Not Anymore

A Manifesto By
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You Don't Have To Live Like Them

When I was 10 years old, I asked myself a simple question, "What if there's more that I can do compared to the average person?"
I spent my childhood in a small Catholic school. We had a small drama assignment for one of our English classes. We had to come up with a monologue that would teach the class a life lesson. A classmate of mine named Giselle gave a lesson that had an impact on me, and it blew my own assignment out of the park.

In her drama piece, she took on the role of an over-weight kid, with a learning disability, who was bullied all through elementary, junior, and high school. The kid worked hard to be liked, but soon decided that she would concentrate on her studies, shake off what people think about her, and work hard. Years later, the girl with many rolls blossomed into a beautiful woman, who owned her own business, had a ton of kids, drove a nice car, and travelled four times a year with her good-looking husband. This "lesson" has stuck with me for many years, but instead of being a blessing, it revealed itself to be a prison for me many years later.

Before I get into describing the feedback loop for hell that I was locked in for so long, let me tell you a bit about myself. I've lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada for 38 years and a small town called Brandon in West Manitoba for three years. No, I'm not a fat kid, but I've always struggled with a learning disability and now, a dad-bod. I am an artist. I used to draw, but then got into writing rap and hip-hop as an outlet for dealing with my own pain as a bullied kid in high school. After a really awful incident, I was taken to a psychiatrist in 2002 who diagnosed me with Aspergers Syndrome.

I have graduated from college twice and consistently failed at maintaining employment because I'm on the autism spectrum. If I wasn't at work, I was trying to make friends with people at church or promoting music or apps I developed in front of a computer screen. I met my wife in 2011, struggled working an office job so we could get married, learned a lot from the self-help industry and how to run an online business before getting married in 2013, started an app flipping business in 2015, and found myself living off savings and my departed grandmother's inheritance since mid-2019.

After getting frustrated over the infamous Canadian Freedom Convoy of 2022 and the fact that so many Christian friends were fighting and bickering over lockdowns and restrictions because of the pandemic, I finally left the church feeling just like the bullied kid in high school. Learning about "The New Apostolic Reformation" and its ties to the system and Christian nationalism also drove me further away from embracing spirituality and turned me into an agnostic.

With no friends to confide in besides my wife, I looked for work outside Manitoba and tried to get hired at Hootsuite in Vancouver. My parents flew me out to my aunt's place to stay for a few months while my wife tried to make our lives work back in Winnipeg. The interview process with Hootsuite wasn't fun at all, and my manual search and networking in Vancouver did not get me very far.

On August 1th 2024, I was house-sitting alone at my aunt's place. My 40s finally caught up with me and I put my back out. The big house turned into my own personal hospital and my wife flew west to help nurse me back to health. We both agreed that I had to come home as soon as I could sit in a plane seat for 3 hours without nerves pinching each other. Ever since I got back, I've been contemplating why my whole life turned into a complete disaster. So between looking for a new job back in my hometown, volunteering in a hackerspace, and trying again in the business world as a sound designer, I have been working on this is a compilation of what I learned in life, as well as what I unlearned.

The views and events expressed in this book will seem a little crazy for those who don't know me well. The views and maxums I put forward will most likely make people of privileged reading very uncomfortable. From looking through a lense of rose-colored privileged sunglasses, to seeing lessons and a reality I wish I embraced after my neurodivergent diagnosis, I'm still sorting out if I'm becoming some kind of radical lefty, or a just a wacky independant thinker. My only other thing to add to this disclaimer of a paragraph is that this whole book is worth a read at least once. It will illustrate how far I've come as a person even though physically, things have been getting worse.

I'd like to begin with a modern lesson that I wish I learned after being diagnosed autistic in 2002:a lot of things we do don't matter at all. So why bother trying?

Now you're probably thinking, "Aaron, are you insane?" Um...ouch, again, learning disability. The other thought that some are thinking who have read a ton of self-help books "Are you ripping off Mark Manson's classic The Subtle Art of Not Giving a "special word?" Sort of, but the more I dug into that intro chapter of his book recently, the more I feel there are some things Manson hints at that I need to say out loud.

First, Manson tells the story of a sad drinking author who worked a dead-end day job. He finally got a book deal but that never changed his situation outside of getting more money. On the author's tombstone, it says "Don't Try." Manson's ideas indicate that we tend to either constantly chase happiness while wondering why we are sad once the happiness goes away, or we try to become something we're not (like feeling entitled to be a chosen celebrity or influencer, or mega-church pastor). The reason this happens is because we try too hard. When we try too hard, we fail, but if we don't try, we get somewhere but that "success" doesn't last. In order to "not try," we have to figure out what is valuable to us individually and live for only those values while avoiding distractions (the hardest part of this whole idea). Only then, will life be fulfilling. That's the lesson of his book in a nutshell, but I believe there's more to it all than that.

My book is dedicated to people who have failed at trying to be normal. It's the voice of those who are outcasted trying to figure out how the world works. It's an ode to those who the world sees as average. It's a book to encourage boldness in individuals whom society sees as failures. It's dedicated to folks who can never mask their neurodiverse brain. It's for anyone who is "labelled" high functioning, but really, they can only function to a point like myself. It's a book that not only explains what I wish I knew in the last 20 years of my life, but hopefully, it's something helpful for anyone who is completely and utterly fed up with this status quo like I am. Hopefully it can breathe life into someone who suffers because of corporate greed. Hopefully it can some form of wealth to those who always struggle with a lack of funds. Hopefully, it can be the cat-scan for someone who's head is injured by metaphorical gravity, after having it in the clouds for so long.

This is in no way a self-help book. It is a self-acceptance book. It's accepting like Linkin Park that many people reading (or not) have tried so hard but in the end it doesn't matter. Certain things in life only matter because "the system" tells us they matter. And sadly, we NEED certain worthless things to matter in this moment because we're stuck depending on them for survival until something better comes along. Many people who hate computers and smartphones are accepting that we have to use those things becaus we live in a society that thrives because of binary 0s and 1s. But does that mean we have to stop saying "log off and touch grass?" Does that mean we have to be sad we're using technology instead of being angry about it or finding hobbies that don't require a screen? I'll leave you as the reader to answer these questions.

When it comes to self-acceptance, I believe it is perfectly okay to say to yourself "I can't do this." You're not saying it because you're weak. You're admitting and embracing the reality that there are certain things you cannot do by yourself. You're also admiting that if something matters, you might need some help when it comes to certain things like finding a job with AI searching, or being unable to fix a showerhead that soaks your entire bathroom. And depending on where you're at, like in my case, saying "I can't do this" when it comes to getting a job in Vancouver and going home to Winnipeg instead, I'm admitting that the thing I cannot do (getting a job in Vancouver) really isn't valuable to me at all in the long termn. It's a discovery, not admitting defeat.

The problem with the self-help industry (which I will go into more details in a later chapter) is that it always gives us the idea that every person should be able to do certain things in certain ways (and yet every guru has their own methods and variations on ideas surrounding hard work and personal responsibilty). It tells men if they are weak, they need to man up and go above and beyond other men. For women, it gaslights them into thinking they are strong enough, brave enough, or smart enough to do certain things they internally know they may never be able to do by themselves or without their girl-boss gal-pals or it encourages them to do something that is not valuable to them individually.

Nevertheless, sometimes we are in places where we need to make things happen. It's beneficial to do two things when trying to attempt this kind of task:
- ask yourself how important it actually is
- figure out if you can do it yourself or if you need help

Gurus may touch on the second step sometimes, but they never look at the first, because they always believe that everyone deserves to be rich, everyone deserves to be their vision of healthy, and everyone deserves a romantic partner. Gurus always tell us we need to go to the gym, to buy the best cars, make memories with the best trips, fight for the best relationships, start the best businesses to run, buy and flip the latest game systems or win with the best Comic Con costumes, use the best tools, take the hottest romantic partners with the best curves to your bedroom, or even to homeschool the best and brightest kids.
But now, we're living in an age where there's more divorce, it's harder to afford a house or a car, not everyone can travel to tropical places like Mexico, and more women don't want kids. This should tell us how badly our culture in general needs collective help rather than just changing the way we think so we can work our way into burnout.

The reason the burnout happens when we fail is because we keep on trying to change ourselves with the end in mind and forget to either figure out why what we do realistically doesn't work, what kind of realistic help we need, what realistic obstacles are in the way, or if our long-term goal we reach will realistically last long term after we reach it. Notice I used one term: realistic. Depending on how privileged we are, most of the values that the system gives us today are actually unrealistic. Because of that unrealism, we are constantly chasing after pleasures that are temporary, or relying on ridiculousness like manifesting and faith to get us through. Those who get out of the self-help movement like I did, eventually figured out that there are certain changes, certain wants, and perhaps even certain needs or statuses that we really don't need or that are not worth doing or pursuing at all.

Our system has conditioned us to get good grades in school, graduate from a good college or university, buy a house, buy a car, work a 9 - 5 job, go on vacation for two to four weeks a year, get married, have kids, and then once we've done all those things, retire and travel until we kick the bucket while making our kids and grand-kids do the same. But what do we do, if no matter how hard we try, we can't even do a fraction of those things? That's where the self-acceptance comes in. Let's go through some examples:

If Bobby tries too hard to get a date with a girl who is not interested in him, he accepts that no matter what he does to pursue her, she will never be with him. Bobby accepts himself by being himself around other girls that he interacts with, but without showing unrealistic confidence or revealing his interest in another girl unless he figures out a girl he gets along well with is interested. Bobby also goes on dates without expecting a girl he's with to put out or relying on a promise that she will be with him until death.

If Darren constantly tries to find a better job outside of being a janitor and no matter what other job he gets, he can't seem to keep that job, he accepts that being a janitor is his calling while he uses what little free time he has to play guitar and perform at open mics. Darren cancels his future appointments with employment agencies, stops following get-rich quick gurus, and if he's respected on the open-mic circuit, he works hard to play guitar and share his music instead, because that's what truly matters to him. Darren doesn't pretend to be all that and a bag of chips. He doesn't spam his Bandcamp or Soundcloud URL everywhere since he's impressive to his community. All he fights for if things get tough is to ensure he has a living wage that will cover his living expenses, a bit more time off if he takes his guitar on the road, and the occassional investments into his family and community he loves.

Self-acceptance gives the person who tries too hard the oppurtunity to do what they can, with the privilege and smarts they have, and removes the self-ableism that comes from the system (ableism in this case is the pursuit of unrealistic exceptionalism and meritocracy by doing more or being more than you can do or be when working and trying hard).It puts focus on what is actually valuable, what isn't distracting, what is socially acceptable, what is easily earned or attainable with assistance, and removes the desire to prove oneself to people who judge them.

Self-acceptance helps an individual no matter who they are suffer as best as possible. It removes a chunk of entitlement. It can direct but doesn't remove temporary over-rated emotions. It keeps people from doing random time-wasting tasks they feel are pointless that they never wanted to do in the first place. And most importantly, while it doesn't cure depression, anxiety, or extreme mental health problems like schizophrenia or bi-polar, it can potentially help an individual answer a very important question: what if it is possible to live a full life as an average person?

A First Thing to Unlearn

Here's another lesson and one of the first things to unlearn when trying to live just a little above average as a first step. We must understand one thing about a person's mind stuck on default: that mind is always subconciously frantic about what people think of them. It's human nature and people who live in a society are terrified of being different.

When people's minds are stuck on default, they easily get worried about the neighbors judging their son's purple hair or forgetting to wear jeans on casual Fridays that aren't too short. And if you post how much you love or are passionate about someone on Facebook (and they don't like you), people in the comments tell you to stop posting lovey dovey stuff. Having a mind stuck on default is all about playing it safe, like listening to the same songs from The Weeknd or only watching PG-rated movies.

It all starts when kids are teens. Even the pot-smokers and metal-heads have to play by the rules. Teens are bullied all the time when they just go and do their own thing, and in order to have a healthy school life, one has to be part of a scene or a clique. Don't wear a shirt with a band or Marvel or DC on it? That poor kid is invisible! And if a geek every got into video game music (in my experience) or was into jungle or breakcore or any kind of movement outside of what's cool or accepted in their local high school, it's like they broke the ultimate bourgeois law. Everyone's wearing these invisible suits of armor, made of the same paper that keeps them from being themselves.

And then there's parents and grandparents, who's default minds don't really have much to give away to future Gen-Z or Millenials. They've got ridiculous Jordan Peterson or Mel Robbins-ish kind of goals that don't lead to anything good.

They watch kids do something different and think it's part of just going through the motions of school, college, marriage, kids, etc. They think if the kids just keep playing the game, they'll eventually win, and that their kids will win inside the same repetitive cycle of the same old stuff. And because everyone's rebelling, the adults subconciously think that it's all just part of growing up, so it never actually changes anything big. It's like a sad dance that everyone's doing (unless of course they're Christian parents trying to keep kids from making mistakes they've seen).

The feeling is completely minimized when the epiphany hits that we're all living in a world that's like a giant puzzle with no picture on the box. Everyone's trying to fit into this "status quo" that's basically just made-up. We watch ads on our phones or YouTube with perfect couples, young adults, or families while thinking living on "default" is what we're supposed to be like. But that's not real life. It's chasing a mirage.

Marriage and family, without any additional purpose or activity to live for, are the ultimate example of minds and lives on default. You're supposed to settle down, get a house, have kids, and live the dream, right? But the reality is, it's all about playing these roles with our minds on default that suck the life out of us. When we try to minimize our default mind, we figure out we're all craving real love and community, but we're stuck in this version of it that's twisted and warped by a corrupt American society. It's a pipe-dream turned reality when like everyone's pretending to be happy, blessed, fortunate, and to be envied, but really, the majority of the population running on default are just lonely and stuck in a routine.

When your mind and life is stuck on default, it is like watching dreams on TV. You've got all this cool tech, flashy clothes, sports equipment, or a giant sound system, but it's just filling a void. We're all stuck in this cycle of wanting more without really knowing what we want. That's why determining what's important is mandatory to live a life and have a mind away from its default setting.

This is important because those who have their minds and life stuck on default are just above being dead. Their robots with credit cards. They're convinced that if everyone else lived in default, they'd be happy too. But the truth is, being on default is just going through the motions, trying not to think about how empty it all feels (and even if we keep doing new things, life is still empty because of the other people living on default). Without the lie that this is the best life, people have to face the fact that they're basically tossing out chances for something real.

So, living on default where we live a certain kind of life because everyone else is doing it is a disease. And sadly, there is no way to completely turn of the "temptation to conform or be shunned" because we all crave a bit of safety. But there is a way to minimize the feeling: and it begins by starting to question it. The more you ask, the more you can start actually living. And people will look at you funny. Who cares? You may not get rich. Who cares (unless you're starving or homeless). You may not lose your virginity. Who cares? You may not have kids. Who cares besides your mom who wants grandkids? Or you simply may only have two to three close friends. Who cares besides those friends? People don't care because most of the time, they only care about themselves, or what they can get from you. If you just do what you do, trendy or not, part of the system or not, you will feel love, joy, and have a taste of a different kind of freedom. Because let's be honest, you chose what's important to you and not to them. And who wants to just do

what is important to most people in this boring fake utopia?
I'm sure I don't.

We All Suffer

When I was a kid, my parents did all they could to keep me happy. They supported all my interests and hobbies, they made sure that we had a minimal amount of toys to play with, and healthy food to eat in moderation. They let us play outside in the street in summer until twilight or until we had to go out somewhere. Sure we had chores, and house rules, and discipline, but I just wasn't happy. And while I do blame the religion I grew up with for trying to gaslight me into thinking Christianity is freedom, I also had to learn something in the last five years: achieving eternal happiness is a fallacy.

As humans, we constantly chase instant gratification and positivity. I've done this for years in order to combat the pain and struggles of little money, low confidence and self-esteem, and becoming a pro at masking autism. I discovered through ancient wisdom, modern psychology, and a trip to my aunt's house in Oshawa Ontario a surprising truth. Happiness cannot be found in avoiding problems, but in embracing them as natural elements of a meaningful life.

There's an old story about a prince living in Nepal. He lived a life most could only dream of. His father sheltered his son from suffering. He erected high walls around their palace and showered the prince in luxury, completely isolated them both from the outside world's hardships.

Despite having every material thing in the world and not knowing how hard people worked or how much pain they had to push through, the young prince was bored and curious. When he finally saw the world outside his palace walls, he was shocked to discover human suffering in its many forms – sickness, old age, poverty, and death. This exposure to reality triggered an existential crisis for the sheltered child. Reacting dramatically, he eventually saw his wealthy lifestyle as completely disgusting and embraced a life that was the complete opposite. He came to the conclusion that suffering might reveal deeper truths about purpose and meaning in this world.

After years of self-imposed hardship, the prince realized that extreme suffering was as meaningless as extreme luxury. Both extremes failed to provide the insight he sought. Finally, after meditating under a tree for forty-nine days, he arrived at a profound realization: suffering is an inevitable part of life. And the only way to live a meaningful life is to solve problems in order to suffer better than those who go through extreme suffering. Quite a big lesson here if you ask me.

Modern science confirms what Buddha figured out: as much as our commercials encourage us to pursue happiness, as much as prosperity gospel preachers want us to be fortunate and to be envied, we all need some suffering big or small because it contains purpose. We experience discomfort and dissatisfaction not as defects of human existence, but as features that drive adaptation and survival. We are biologically wired to become dissatisfied with what we have and to desire what we don't have. This constant state of mild dissatisfaction has propelled human innovation and progress throughout our history. Suffering encourages leftists to fight for their right to exist. Suffering encouraged right-wingers to storm the capital on January 6th (while I strongly oppose the event since its roots are fascist, I empathize with those who attended who want to fight to work at their jobs during a pandemic where they had to isolate and lose money).

Pain, both physical and psychological, works as a feedback system. Physical pain teaches us to avoid dangerous situations and respect our limitations. Psychological pain, which our brains process very much like physical pain, keeps us on our toes when our emotional or social boundaries have been violated. These kinds of discomfort aren't punishments but they can steer us toward beneficial changes in our personal behavior and to fight for change in outside circumstances.

When we attempt to stop all discomfort from our lives by sheltering our kids from reading "banned books, movies, or TV shows" or by stopping our sons from joining the army because we don't want them to die fighting, we actually weaken this vital feedback mechanism. Socially maladjusted kids, in religious households who become adults, and conspiracy theories prove that when a group of people constantly shield themselves from inevitable discomforts, they will end up disconnecting from reality and losing multiple growth opportunities that healthy doses of pain will provide.

I find it funny how we all think that it's so easy to be happy. "All I have to do is achieve X, acquire Y, or become Z, and then I'll be happy." Wrong.
The people who think this way have their minds set to default while getting sucked into self-help YouTube and motivational memes from Instagram like I did in the past.

Happiness cannot be permanently earned, not even through being at the right place at the right time doing or buying the right thing. It doesn't even exist when we get to a certain milestone, a certain goal, a certain income level, a certain relationship status, a certain number of kids, or a certain career achievement. What makes us happy today won't be satisfying tomorrow. Our biology constantly changes its standards, demanding more, different, or better. Even when we fight it, that biology still gives us the feeling of dissatisfaction.

Enough is never enough. We can never be satisfied with what we have, and will never be satisfied with what we want.
I almost went into an existential crisis figuring this out once I finally reached the goal of moving to Vancouver in 2024 after years of planning to work in a different city and then injuring my back and returning to Winnipeg.

I learned quickly that even when people reach goals they've been chasing for decades – the dream job, the perfect partner, the beautiful home, the number of subscribers on YouTube or members in a Discord channel – the expected lasting happiness doesn't even become a thing. Instead, people chase the next thing, while feeling inadequate despite everything they were doing to build up to their present moment. While I was in Vancouver and failed a job interview, I kept on pursuing the next place to apply, the next place to network, and even in my spare time, I pursued the next open mic to perform at, the next club to enjoy house music, or even the next group of anarchists I could hang out and protest the status quo with.

The point is that it's hard for people to accept that problems in life are always around; like that disc that constantly slips in my back. They never disappear entirely – they merely change form, ideally into problems that are more intense or problems that are fun to solve. Donald Trump has a ton of problems, as does the homeless person sleeping on the bus bench of St. Anne's and Fermor in St. Vital Winnipeg. The difference is merely in the quality of their diverse privilege (like money in this example).

When we solve one problem, a new problem is invented. Move into a new house or apartment, and you'll face the challenges clogged toilets, mold within walls, or making sure heavy furniture you can't move yourself is in the right place. Dedicate Friday nights to improving a marriage, and there will be issues that come about with planning activities, making sure there's enough money for date nights, and rekindling romantic chemistry. And then there's political organizing to ensure that protests remain peaceful (see, even leftists have to take personal responsibility just like people on the right say they don't).

This is a pattern that every single person including me experiences indefinitely. Letting this epiphany sink in will free you from the frustration of expecting a problem-free existence. Instead of hoping for no problems, pushing for meaning in life should include looking for challenges that engage our capabilities and align with our values.

Happiness doesn't come from singing Hakuna Matata. Having no worries for the rest of our days isn't just shallow, it just doesn't exist. Happiness comes as a result of taking on life's challenges, not in escaping from them. The key word is "solving" – both avoiding problems and feeling overwhelmed by unsolvable problems lead to misery. A response to problems at some point in the near future is what helps us to live a fruitful life.

To experience genuine contentment, we need challenges that help us build character realistically and appropriately. Sometimes these are simple problems we can enjoy like cooking a home-made pizza or mastering a new video game. Other times, we have no choice but to deal with abstract and complex issues, like finding some form of work if unemployed, improving family relationships, or trying to convince our annoying neighbor in the upstairs apartment that their music is too loud. The specific nature of the problems doesn't matter as much as our relationship to them because true happiness comes when we find problems we enjoy having and enjoy solving.

The paradox of happiness is that we must deal with suffering and problems rather than escape from them. Being content in life isn't found in building the perfect world of external circumstances while eliminating all problems and drama. A full life comes from finding challenges that engage our capabilities and align with our values, while working to address them. In this process of meaningful problem-solving, we discover something more valuable than eternal happiness or even heaven on earth: we see a life of purpose, growth, and authentic well-being.

And sometimes that suffering has another very important purpose: to test others. The encouraging part of suffering is that as a test, it is a test for the ones around the sufferer.

Because in reality, one doesn't suffer in isolation. Suffering entails the existence of everyone in an individual's collective community, whether or not they are currently present before us or connected elsewhere. In a sad way, it is in comparison that we suffer. And that is a call to action for others around to step up and alleviate the suffering you are going through. Because asking to stop comparison is like asking to close your eyes. The world doesn't become dark just because you closed your eyes. Closing your eyes stops you from seeing the beauty and opportunities of this world.

By accepting suffering as inevitable and understanding problems as a natural part of life, we can build a more realistic life and ultimately a more satisfying outlook that embraces challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles to happiness.

Reality Bites

When I was young and sheltered. watching superhero cartoons and their commercials on TV, I believed there was a magical place where everything was ideal and I was a hero. The characters with charm and charisma that saved the city they lived in convinced me that adventure, oppurtunity to make a difference, and excitement dwelt in such perfection. I aspired to such a life and started searching for some kind of chemical to turn into The Flash, shoes that would make me run fast like Sonic, or a radioactive spider that would make me stronger than Peter Parker.

Then when I turned 17, I ditched the search for that "thing" that would make me a hero and became a hip-hop artist who would try to "wake people up." I kept on searching and searching for record labels that would hear my tunes, poorly connected with people who would potentially become fans. And finally, in June 2020, at 37 years-old, I finally learned that reality seldom mirrors the images, memes, cartoons, and inspirational messages I grew up with all these years: messages that I could be a hero, that I could be anything, and that if I worked hard enough I could make a difference along with a lot of money.

We tend to think we can live as close as we can to the perfect life we want based on advertisments or symbolic representations of what we value. A custom mix-and-match waredrobe can symbolize rebellion or make someone feel attractive, a car can represent vitality or status, and sending money to a favourite politician may equate to revolution. This belief that the right accessories eventually leads to utopia is deeply ingrained.

The significance of images that shape our values and ideologies today is partly due to how the system markets them to us. Advertising and marketing sell us on the idea that products possess almost mystical properties: Old Spice promises popularity or power, Monster energy drinks embodies youthful energy, and clothing from Spensers oozes sex appeal (and their 18+ products in the back of the store literally take that appeal to an extreme). We constantly exchange our time and creativity at work, or selling things on Facebook marketplace, Kijiji, or Karrot, for extra money to buy these symbols, which perpetuate a cycle of wanting more. The illusion is that these products satisfy our desires, but they only create additional needs, ensnaring us to subconciously ask in a cycle of consumption: When is enough enough?

Chasing imaginary images and unreachable dreams is so much easier than confronting reality, and when one is religious, the need to hang onto those images becomes so strong that if the image fades, the religious person would rather go to hell. It's less risky to manifest or pray what is desired but not necessary into existence than to put in work to at least do the best you can to ensure what's needed is important and achieved. However, a life of authentic adventure, being healthy and creative, connecting with other people, and romancing does not require a picturesque cabin, a nice house, the right software to create music or edit images, or matching accessories. Identifying with a commonly used template or pre-made image is simpler than determining and working towards genuine aspirations and values.

Our fascination with marketted things, things we need that appeal to us, leads us to seek life in that has impossible expectations based on visual representations of experiences. These expectations fed to us through the system, from television to celebrity gossip to politics, keep us engaged in a fantasy world without involving us. They isolate us, making us feel connected to events and characters that do not truly affect us, while distancing us from our real lives, tasks that we actually NEED to do, and communities that we have a chance to change.

We've become so accustomed to being the platform hero in a video game that we often feel more capable of jumping around to save a princess rather than to do something small like take out the garbage without a camera following us around. This is reflected in our language. We tend to speak of societal changes as if they are out of our control, yet we are the ones actively shaping our world.

To genuinely pursue happiness, we must seek meaningful experiences rather than trying to emulate what we see on TV, what self-help gurus tell us to do or to chase or to be, and have realistic goals to do on our bucket lists. Our value in life should come from actions and emotions that we can realistically do and feel, not from what we possess, how we look, how many friends or likes we get on social media, or if we do something cool on-stage that goes viral on YouTube. Only by actively AND REALISTICALLY participating in the shaping of our world as best as we can, do we head towards a place where we can claim true agency in our lives.

Our obsession with attention, leaving a legacy, being part of a cult that knows the "truth," or doing something significant suggests a deeper insecurity about our existence. We capture moments with smartphone cameras, reducing life to two-dimensional images that offer a false sense of control. But this detached way of living, experiencing the world through a lens, scrolling a social media feed, is no substitute for authentic living.

To live a life of purpose, we must shift our values from observing to actually participating outside our homes and apartments. We need to stop consuming and constantly be creating. Only then, can we move beyond the illusion of an unrealistic pursuit of what isn't real into an actual reality where we are the authors of our own destinies.

You're Not Special

I used to believe I was special. That I was chosen. That I had a higher calling than everyone else. That all changed for me when I look back on a friendship I had with the nephew of a mega-church pastor.

Let's call him Chris. Chris was a Christian I met at one of the two churches I used to attend while being a more religious troglodyte. Like me, he knew the Bible quite well and we had some great conversations about religion and politics. He was fun to talk to while having coffee with a couple of friends.

But if our gatherings were much more than one on one, Chris would always brag about how awesome his apartment is and how he got to date the hottest Christian girl in his uncle's mega-church, which in itself isn't really worth bragging about.

I soon discovered that Chris had a rough time with his life. His parents paid for his rent because he kept getting fired from jobs for sexual harrassment. Girls were uncomfortable with him when he would flirt with them. To top it all off, most of the time, he never had any money and was disowned by the pastor's extended family.

I'm not sure where Chris is now. He has no social media accounts. No one I'm still connected with from that mega-church knows where he is. I have a feeling that most likely he's either on welfare or sadly committed suicide because he didn't bother to change from the default mindset we discussed earlier. I'm not sure if he was on the autism spectrum or not. But either way, I think he would have a hard time reading this part of the book if he was alive today.

So when did people start to feel “special?”

Back in the 1960s, psychology was doing a lot of deep studies on self-esteem. It was encouraged to "just be positive" or "think happy thoughts." During this era of post-50s prosperity, research determined that if you think highly about yourself, you'll excel at anything you put your hands to. If you just avoid negativity, you won't have to choose how you suffer or deal with huge problems to deal with in your life.

Influencers who enforced policy believed these researchers and decided to do what they can to collectively boost the self-esteem of their countries' general population. As a result, the government at the time believed more people will be employed and make lots of money. They estimated that students will do better in class. They predicted that crime would be lowered, and there wouldn't be much of a budget deficit to worry about.

Once the 1970s arrived, parents began to raise kids on these types of (now debunked) growth mindsets. "Just being positive" or "thinking happy thoughts" also started being taught by therapists, politicians, pastors, and other people of influence. It even infiltrated the educational system. Participation awards, grade inflation, motivational seminars, and business leadership schools came from these mindsets. This type of toxic positivity eventually found its way into "blessed" hyper-Pentecostal New Apostolic Reformation movements where preachers would tell their congregation they have the ability to do abundantly great things because they're all equally special in God's eyes.

But the truth is coming out fairly quickly today. Like the fires in Los Angeles at the beginning of the year, more and more places that were "nice to live in" are being ravaged by climate change. Prices of groceries are climbing higher thanks to tariffs. Young people in their 20s cannot get married or buy a house. The rich get much richer, more people are losing their jobs, and even more people are getting into credit card debt. The idea that working hard leads to success has become a complete lie for people who are disabled both physically or intellectually like me. And working hard for marginalized folks has lead to much worse circumstances where they burn out or are driven to insanity because all they do is work and have little time to take care of themselves.

Almost everyone, who isn't in a conspiritual headspace or making the income of seven figures or more, has built up enough self-awareness to realize they are simply mundane. Just being positive, thinking happy thoughts, and even having a rock solid self-esteem doesn't really mean much unless you have a reason to feel good about yourself. Over the last decade, I've constantly been falling and learning to pick myself up while accomplishing a few things here and there. This consistent trial and error of my life has actually helped me to build a better mindset than the entitled attitude I had before I went to college in 2009.

Over the last decade, I figured out that teaching people they're going to become successful and great while also building their self-esteem to feed their ego doesn't create an entire world full of Ryan Goslings or Dolly Partons. It actually leads to a large Tokyo-sized population of Chris' with minds on default.

The problem with "just being positive" and "thinking happy thoughts" just to feel good about yourself is that it determines how much self-esteem a person has by how happy they are with themselves as they are. If Chris felt great about himself all the time even if he was getting charged with sexual harrassment, how is the metric valid for the success he actually has in his life? It's not.

Feeling "special" is essentially entitlement. The people like Chris in the world think they can simply follow straight-forward instructions of a snake-oil salesman and then become rich running a custom Fortune 500 company. They think they can smooth-talk a woman into bed without having a meaningful relationship. They even think that they can go to the gym and become like Dwayne Johnson just because they are desperate to stop being a Chris.

The people like Chris in this world feel so good about themselves that they live an illusion of blessing that doesn't exist. That blessing seems cool on the outside. It gives confidence. It attracts people who are looking for a new spark in their own lives. This delusional positivism has taken over the entire world like a virus and it's still an on-going mind-virus of a pandemic. It's contagious and other people want to be like Chris before he completely disappeared.

The problem with a culture of entitlement is that it plants cravings in a person's soul to feel good, to feel high all the time, even if everyone else feels like garbage. Every life event to an entitled person is either a blessing or a curse, not something to learn from. Challenging an entitled person's mentality (while they try to live a default life exceptionally) is threatening to a person's superiority. Because of that, it takes a lot to break a person out of a mold of entitlement. In my case, shutting down my business as an app developer and almost having my back destroyed by sciatica last summer broke me out of my own mold of entitlement.

"But Aaron, I'm not entitled at all!"

Nice try. Pride and entitlement are the same thing. I’m entitled. You’re entitled. Your kid is entitled. Your mom is entitled. And so is your dad. Even my departed grandma who I love so much is entitled. All human beings are entitled. The question is not if we are entitled or how we become entitled. We should be asking what we feel we are entitled to, and who we feel owes us said entitlements. Once we find out that SOME of these things we feel entitled to aren't such a big deal, we start to figure out what's valuable and worth fighting for when asking the question often.

“So, Aaron, how do I become a ‘not so special’ person?”

I'm honestly no expert at this. All I know is that to stay away from the attitude of feeling "special" or entitled, it requires constant tweaking of your mindset. Think before speaking. Ask questions instead of constantly pushing your own viewpoint. Know when to focus on the collective and not so much on yourself individually unless it involves needed self-care. Don’t be a jerk.

The other hard thing to learn is that when it comes to shallow wants that we don't get, it's time to stop playing the victim all the time. Playing the victim while chasing things we don't need is also a form of entitlement because it's a subtle art of getting people to pay attention to you and cater to shallow wants like getting more followers on social media or getting money for Christmas to go on a trip to Europe. In a way, it’s entitlement in disguise. Once you admit there's something in your life which is in your control that needs to be changed, you're on your way to becoming a better person. Of course, if you do need something you feel entitled to, this is an exception to the rule. You are a legit victim here, but you may have to work on pushing yourself to call for help or ask for assistance (something I still have trouble with).

“So if I’m not special, what’s the point?”

The problem with being entitled to a life that doesn't fit your values is that this awful attitude has spread through our culture for a long time. It's become acceptable to think we can all do something awesome with our lives that should be written in collective history. We should always be encouraged to live life differntly, but not to reach goals of becoming the next superstar with the spotlight, smoke, biography, and movie about our lives all at the same time. Everyone says we deserve the spotlight and we don't, princess. Political figures, talk show hosts, businessmen, even actors on commercials in the ads we're bombarded with everyday say we can become "extra-ordinary." Trump is notorious for flaunting this kind of entitlement, constantly pushing the idea that "we're always going to win and we're always going to feel good!"

But if we all become "extra-ordinary," then by definition, no one becomes "extra-ordinary." This is the meaning behind the statement, "I'm unique...just like everyone else."

No one wins and no one feels good.

Our society has come to a place where the new adjective for a loser is "average." And yet, the average person who still lives with enough privilege is able to take whatever life gives them and makes the best of that life.

I think that most of us marginalized or disabled people can do is just work with what we have to live out a meaningful existence. Life has its highs and its boring routines. Reminding ourselves of that is very uncomfortable, but it is needed. Embracing this knowledge can uplift the soul while helping us live radically different when oppurtunities arrive. It can help you achieve realistic goals in your life as well as give you the self-esteem you need to do things differently. Knowing this has the potential to help you avoid judging people or raising your expectations of others too high while also not caring what people think. It will keep you from feeling worthless when your STEM family makes fun of you or chastises you behind your back, because they don't approve of how much money you make, or the hobbies you have that make you the family’s black sheep, or the fact you have no kids.

The point of knowing you're not “that kind of special” or entitled is that it will help you find meaning in this capitalist hellscape that wants people to hoard things or have connections with people that don't matter. It will help you enjoy a close friendship, focus on art, and may help you be thankful for living in the place you're in right now. Yes, it sounds kind of counter-intuitive just being another individual with a red shirt on the Starship Enterprise raging against the machine. But that's life. Life is mundane and it may not be the kind of "special" you want, but that in itself is what makes life worth living.

This was a very hard chapter for me to write because I constantly struggle with "being positive" or "thinking happy thoughts" since my personal struggles are getting worse. And if you're life is like mine, this kind of mindset is hard to obsorb in the beginning. I guarantee though that if you think on it and question how it relates to your own life, you’ll see life a lot more differently than you do right now, especially if you feel special and that the world owes you everything you want now (that you'll find worthless a year later).

Time

When it comes to freedom, everyone knows that we always have someone telling us what to do, where to go, what to listen to, and why we do what we do. We all have to shop for groceries and stuff for our houses or apartments. If we aren't working remote (which I've wanted to do since 2004), we have to commute from half an hour to three hours to work for eight and a half hours or more just to survive in a big city.

Even how we spend our time is based on how much money we have, whether it's paying for internet or Netflix to watch TV or subscriptions to the news in order to have a conversation at a family gathering (seriously, I go to family gatherings to talk about anything except politics), DLC content just to enjoy playing video games, memberships to the gym, constant visits at an art store for pens and paper etc.

Outside of weekends if we don't have kids, we're all like robots moving from one spot to the next, and people who operate on default we don't even realize it. A perfect example to illustrate my point is the malls that are left. We walk in, and they basically tell us, "Hey, come in and buy stuff. You may not need that stuff, but once you spend some money, you'll be happy and your life will change" and we just go along. We're happy for a bit and then once what we bought breaks or we get bored, we're sad again. Sometimes, I feel like simply going for a walk, sitting by a river to record a stream for a music project, or even taking random photos or videos with my phone is simply not allowed because it doesn't feed the "capitalist blood machine."

Bill Watterson who created Calvin and Hobbes said that "childhood is short. Maturity is forever." And whenever I hear that quote, I realize that we have very little control of our time. We're all on the same clock, whether we like it or not. Work, school, the bus or sky-train schedule, it's all about the system keeping us on track. When we "mature" or grow up, we don't get to enjoy our time anymore. Instead, we live by the rules of someone else's calendar. Spontaneity is like a fairy, something we read about in books but never actually see. And unless we're unemployed or taking a vacation, times when we finally have some spare time to ourselves, it's usually just doing chores, taking care of kids, eating, or shaving hair out of strange crevices in our bodies. No wonder adults are pissed off all the time once they grow up. It's because they don't have the space to be the children they once were and maybe even always wanted to be.

Our apartment building structures and the way houses are built aren't much help either. We're put in these buildings that prevent us from really getting to know different people, travelling to new places, and learning about other cultures. We spend our lives in the same old house or suite with the same people and barely invite people over if we do have friends. It's a never-ending loop of boredom. We call our homes our safe spaces, but they're like little forts that are seen by many as strongholds from people who make us uncomfortable. By sectioning us off into "nuclear families," we miss amazing oppurtunities to connect with our neighbors or have no idea that there are cool community events we could attend.

Speaking of travel, especially for those reading about 15 Minute Cities, here's the real conspiracy to note: if a person has a ton of money and privilege, that person can go far with cars and planes, but most of us reading are not rich. Sure, we can whine about being sectioned off into districts like the Hunger Games, but that's not what's really happening. Our capitalist system wants us to stick to our routes to work, malls, grocery stores, and gyms so the people running these places make money and take our time away. It is discouraged to go off roads to kill time to enjoy the neighborhood, so they pay us less to try to keep us from using bikes, cars, or planes to go anywhere. We're paid so little and travel has become so expensive that the only way to see the world is by watching it on TV. We think we're seeing more, but really we're just seeing the same old stuff in the same old colony. We're living our own Truman show or Groundhog Day on a loop. And some of us are so used to this that we give up on seeing our world around us in person as an important healthy value in life. That's the real conspiracy.

And yet, because the world beats us down and continues to take take take from us, we are stuck, sitting in our rooms, not using our bodies, just overworking our brains and turning them into vegetables when we're so tired. Subconciously, we all want to feel things, smell things, and taste things. We long to use more than just our brains because we're full humans with five senses that need to be fed with experiences.

One of the reasons I ran away from Winnipeg in 2024 once I got that job interview for Hootsuite was because I thought Winnipeg could never be a place brewing with new activities that let us break out of the mundane (besides church. We have enough churches in every town). After attending a social event at Skullspace, I realized that things were starting to change. But we have a lot more work to do. I believe if those changes continue, we'll see a much more vibrant downtown with open-mics near Portage and Main and not just that ugly Cube Stage in the summer. We can have house or techno music in the middle of random streets instead of Meme Fest or Pride Month. The point is that even though it's slow, we need to go back to a time no matter what town we're in where we bring the fun back into public spaces and break free from the routine at least once a day so no one can keep suffering long term from crippling depression in the winter time. We need to go back to a time when we could still have fun without our smartphones or computers. We need to build towns, cities, metropolis' and entire countries that are known for creativity and connection.

But the point of all this is to get over our obsession with time. Sometimes, it's good to stop checking what time it is and be in the present moment. One of the reasons I don't drive is because walking or biking lets me really see and feel the world around me. If I walk far enough, I can easily find hidden adventures in my own neighborhood. No need to spend money.

It's time to wake up and live in an interesting world again. They tell us to be a rebel, to get married, to start a family, to "think for ourselves," to buy land, to turn off the news, and to refuse to live in fear. Some of that may seem fine on the outside, but I have a better idea:
Travel to places you've never been to when you can afford it. Learn from other cultures. Set tables with lots of food. Bond with people who are "different." Enjoy other people's movies, pictures they draw, music they make, and create your own art even if people around you say it sucks. Reach out, give to neighbours, and build community. You won't change the world but you'll brighten someone's day.

Freedom Being Upset

"*Freedom doesn't exist. We're equal because we have something to be upset about,*" *- anonymous*

Ever since mid-2020, there's this conversation amongst the people who used to be close to me about this thing called "freedom." I kept seeing statements about "personal freedom" or "freedom to choose" or "freedom isn't free." Recently, with the election of Trump and the rise of a conspiritual populist conservatism all over the world, that word has constantly come up again in my social media feeds and the discourse only makes me want to crawl into a hole and become an anti-social hermit. So I decided to reflect on my views on freedom and sadly, because I'm disabled and autistic, I can only see freedom and equality in a cynical light.

On the surface, I sometimes feel like freedom doesn't exist at all because we're all stuck with shared experiences of dissatisfaction or suffering. But when I take other attempts at swimming in the deep thought of complexities of societal constructs and the human condition, I see a challenge of the conventional notion that freedom is a universal truth, and instead, find myself wondering if equality is derived from our collective acknowledgment of the limitations and imperfections inherent in human existence.

So first, let me illustrate my thoughts and questions on the illusion of freedom. On days when I feel that "freedom doesn't exist," I always meditate on the questions about the nature of freedom. I always question whether true freedom is something achievable or is it just an idealistic view of the world that a lot of people "stand up" for. Most of the time, I feel like freedom is an illusion, as our choices and actions are influenced by various external factors such as culture, laws, and social norms. Other times, I feel that freedom is relative based on a person's individual privilege and their external circumstances.

For instance, a liberal may think they are free while living within societal constraints, yet a conservative may feel like they're in prison despite having the same legal rights and privileges. So is freedom an objective reality or a subjective experience, shaped by individual perception and context? Is it really true that one person's freedom is another person's prison? Or is the pursuit of absolute freedom a futile endeavor, since it's subtle and may even be an obstacle to understanding our shared human experience?

I want to shift the focus now towards equality and the commonalities that actually do unite and shape certain types of group dynamics. I believe our shared experiences of dissatisfaction or hardship are what truly make us equal, rather than any inherent or bestowed rights or laws we've been given. While I used to believe the opposite, I now deeply question if equality is a static state that can be granted or achieved through political or legal means alone. I don't think equality can be achieved anymore because it's a dynamic condition that emerges from the recognition of our collective struggles and vulnerabilities.

It is through these shared experiences that we empathize with one another, fostering a sense of solidarity and common ground. And that empathy is being completely destroyed on both the left and the right by this rise of trendy neoliberal populaism and anti-intellectualism. And yet, I sometimes wonder if a commonality of outrage serves as a foundation upon which we can build a more equitable and empathetic society, since it can allow us to see beyond superficial differences and appreciate the universal human experience. Who knows?

Now, when it comes to freedom, dissatisfaction is often a catalyst for change. Even in my agnostic rage against the Christianity I grew up with, I think Proverbs 29 does raise a point that when the wicked rule, the people groan. It is the discontent with the status quo (with the rich and tech industries getting richer while kissing the ring of conspirituality) that will drive progressive societies to challenge and overcome various forms of oppression and fascism throughout history. I'm not sure if we'll come to a place where outrage can be a unifying force that propels us toward greater equality, yet I always knew that our outrage rather than our peaceful disagreement comes from struggles and injustices, regardless of our individual freedoms.

The problem is that if progressives want freedom, they need to work on getting away from social media and its outrage and figure out more ways to organize together to address the underlying issue each local area faces, but it's so freaking hard when our entire system continually keeps us isolated (and the more privilege one lacks, the more isolated they become, and the more isolated they become, the more they have to undertake the roughest task of focusing their outrage). After touching grass for a bit away from computer screens, collective effort can lead to societal advancements, as seen in the civil rights movements, where people united despite their diverse backgrounds to fight for a more equitable world. Hard times serve as a reminder that in most cases, we are not as divided as we might believe, especially up here in Canada when tariffs became a hot topic. Our commonalities can be leveraged to create a more equitable, inclusive, accessible, diverse, and just society.

After doing this intense thought experiment, I've concluded that before using the word freedom, every person living in a "Westernized" country should reevaluate their individual understanding of freedom and equality. The quest for freedom never was about achieving an unattainable state of absolute liberation. Real freedom is about what we can sacrifice for the purpose of creating a world where our shared humanity is recognized and valued. As for equality, it can't be exclusively a legal or political concept; it should be a lived experience of empathy and mutual respect, whether it's listening to a person who immigrated to the US or Canada share their fear of being deported, or listening to a man who's afraid that their masculinity will be eventually outlawed.

By figuring out what makes ALL people upset (especially when it comes to disability, race, LGBTQA+, and many other issues that could prevent the working class from going to their job the following day), we can cultivate a society that addresses the systemic issues that perpetuate inequality and strives for a more equitable distribution of power and resources. In order for our kids to make it to 2100, we must eventually move beyond the pursuit of individual freedom and instead focus on the common good, fostering a more interdependent and compassionate world. If anything, I want this chapter to be a stark reminder that true equality is not found in the absence of freedom but in the collective acknowledgment of our shared human condition and the collaborative efforts to improve it.

On Hierarchy and Morality

If you did well in school, slayed every single class subject with straight As, then the working world of STEM, becoming a CEO, or even starting your own business in law, finances, or insurance is perfect for you. But if you're reading this book, you probably ddidn't get good marks or were relieved to finally have the summer off after the last class in May or June. As soon as I started working like a dog in front of the grill at McDonald's, I discovered that the world of work is just basically high school with a higher risk of drowning in a sea of co-worker drama with little chance of promotion, and fewer chances at friendship with fellow workers or being taken seriously by supervisors when customers or clients are whiny or when other co-workers screw you over . Work has the same old power trips, but instead of teachers and principles, you have bosses, foremen, real estate agents, landlords, and cops.

When I finally left high school, a weight slowly lifted off my shoulders after turning 18. I could finally spend some time alone playing video games and producing my very first rap album. I was so happy to get a break from being told what to do after graduation. And then something happened. Phil from McDonald's on St. Mary's gave me a job even though I did poorly in the interview. I was happy to start making my own money to become financially independent and then I saw some people who still went to my old high school, who trained people like me on the job, and who were popular both in school and while helping Phil sort finances and schedule when certain workers would come in to flip burgers and assemble them. McDonald's turned out to be just more of the same, only with no spares and at some point in 2002, unwanted bills for a psychiatric assessment for ASD. The adult world's a real swift kick in the butt when it comes to freedom. Not only did I have to "run on default" while on the job, I had to put on a mask to co-workers who used to go to high school with me who still treated me like that "special kid" who was constantly picked on.

To me, hierarchy is one of the most disgusting components of the status quo. It's why everyone so obsessed with telling us what to do and who's in charge. It's like the world's worst pyramid scheme where everyone's "fighting" to be closer to the top, while "being friends," "building a network," and still pushing each other around. And we're stuck doing this because we've been raised from a young age to take orders from anyone who's got a fancy title or more money than us. I had a crush on a girl named Patty while she was in high school. I didn't know she worked as a manager at McDonald's when I was hired. The moment we worked our first shift together and she kept on correcting me when I made mistakes, was the shift that caused my feelings to completely disappear. This hierarchy is why a ton of awful things happen in society: racism, sexism, refusing to believe in climate change and environmental decay while driving cars and littering in the park; you name it, it's hierarchy.

I never liked rules. And it's not just because of how constraining and legalistic they are. Because I'm autistic, I had to figure out how to live a certain way that was different in order for me to process the world around me properly as well as to preserve my mental and physical health. Maybe that's why I'm starting to become more of an anarchist sometimes, not in a 'smash everything' kind of way, but just doing certain things without constantly needing someone else's stamp of approval. It's probably why I enjoy places like raves and hackerspaces where there are people with different dress codes, different genders, and different ways of seeing technology and the world, yet we all bring something to the party. We either drink and dance to dark techno or house music, we get into groups and compete playing video games, Dungeons and Dragons, or chess, or just program random things and create art without any rules or bosses telling us what to do outside of managing funding and basic decorum to keep the space going. That's the kind of anarchy I'm talking about here - just good vibes, being helpful, and keeing each other happy in a dark world.

I know for a fact that deep down we all want to live out our own lives and do their own thing without someone else's boot on our necks. That's kind of what anarchism is all about in a nutshell. It's not about burning down buildings or not having any rules or giving into chaos and "anarchy" (although sometimes that is entertaining). Living a good life is about questioning why we put up with so uneeded misery and injustice from people who say they know how we should suffer in life better than we do. It's about realizing that we can actually live a full fruitful life without someone bossing us around all the time.

Is it all just a pipe dream? Can we really live without bosses, cops, and governments? When one does research, history gives some good examples of societies that didn't put hierarchy on a pedastol and they still managed to have an economy, good education, and basic resources with reasonable costs. I've always found when I'm not being told what to do, when I'm not being micro-managed in a call centre, when I don't have a to-do list, I'm ten times more productive. And when I'm more productive and don't have to be put under a microscope, I do a little better than usual in social situations, especially when I travel outside Winnipeg or Brandon. But life is unfortunately all about playing 'King of the Hill' and playing with power (in a non-Nintendo kind of way) leads to things going off the rails.

If you're reading this and you're into the idea of calling the shots in your own life and not letting anyone else tell you who you are or what you should be doing, maybe it's time to see how a new world can be built with the mindset of today's anarchism. Somedays I do want to just tear it all down, but again, anarchism is about building something better, it's about slowly and passionately constructing a world that actually works for everyone. Who knows? Perhaps if we start small, like not letting our jobs or landlords or the government run our lives, we can create up to something bigger, like a society where everyone's got a voice and everyone's treated like they matter. It's a big ask, but if we don't aim for the horizon miles away, we won't move an inche.

So, let's stop seeing anarchism as some wild political theory like communism or Marxism, and see it as a way to live our lives without letting anyone else control us. It's possible for us to start looking at the world and saying, "You know what? Maybe we don't need all these power-hungry billionaires telling us what to do. Maybe we can sort this out ourselves and quit simping around." And if you're in a situation like me where you can't change the world, the best place to start is by not letting anyone tell us we're not good enough, or that we don't deserve happiness, or that our lives aren't worth living unless we're climbing the corporate ladder or following all the 'right' rules. It's not virtue signalling when it's telling the truth.

When I used to go to church, my old pastor once said that "we all have an inner socialist" but I think, we all are anarchists at heart in a way. If a good portion of people reading this get it, we don't need to put much effort into fighting the power, one small step at a time, until something finally changes; whether it's getting a basic income with profit as a side effect or having a three day work week.

Anarchy, not communism or socialism or Marxism, is about building a society where everyone's happy and no one's got to break their backs just to survive.

Morality is an Illusion

Sometimes, my wife lets me read some of her psychology papers that she's using for study at University of Winnipeg. One of her papers discussed how teenagers rebel against their parents. Rebellion starts when teens accuse parents of double standards their parents taught them, like being kind, loving your neighbor as yourself, and being a good citizen. At that point, these teens haven't really figured out who they are or what they believe in, but they're still playing by their parents' rules, just pointing out the hypocrisy. It's only later when they start questioning everything that they become who they want to be.

During the pandemic as a Christian, I came to a place before becoming agnostic where I actually asked where right and wrong come from. So when we say it's wrong to have pets or rage at cat and dog owners in comment sections for filming pets to get likes and comments on social media without feeding them, I wonder if we're just metaphorically using the same moral playbook the system has given to us, but playing a different game? Maybe we're not actually questioning rules and morality in the game itself, just the moves we make in response to morals and rules.

I used to believe that everyone knows right from wrong. I used to think that just telling Christians to stop supporting Donald Trump, stop being a racist, and stop blaming poor and disabled people for their circumstances would actually wake people up and make them more accountable to what Jesus or the bible says. I was wrong. I was very very wrong.

I had to figure out that right and wrong aren't like math equations that are the same for everyone. Morals are more like faith (or to Biblically put it, evidence of the "things unseen"). I figured out that believing in moral law or enlightenment is just like believing that the earth was created in seven literal days. Besides Christians thinking autistic people are demon-posessed, the idea that good and evil are just out there in the universe like gravity just didn't seem logical to me. These two things, along with mom screaming at my wife and I to have children or we're disobeying God, got me to quit believing in evangelical Christianity and going to church.

When people talk about universal moral truths or when conservatives talk about "common sense," I feel like those people are trying to sell us something. And I certainly fell for that sales pitch from Pastor Danny or Pastor Leon while attending Springs Church. "You've got to believe in these moral laws," they say, "or else chaos will reign and you'll go to hell!" But if we have to believe in these laws by faith and not by sight, why should we care about them? It's like saying Ashura is the reason we shouldn't litter — if Ashura isn't real or just a totem poll, then littering is okay, right? That's the kind of logic that just didn't add up the more I thought about it.

Am I saying we should just do whatever we want? Should we go out and assasinate a politician we don't like, go to Walmart and steal food and clothes, squat in an apartment, or be selfish jerks? Absolutely not at all. What I'm saying is that a large part of conforming to the system is embracing the idea that there's some moral rulebook out there that everyone has to follow (doesn't matter if we're talking about the Bible, the US Constitution, The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or the laws of whatever country we live in).

I came to the conclusion that our evolving values help us individually determine what's right and wrong over time. We all have to figure out what we value and stick to those values, because the values we have are what will help us be more fair and just much better than written or moral law ever could. And many times, those values will be different from our friends and families or from what we were brought up with. I don't even have the same values or priorities as my wife. Determining what you value should be like making your very own exclusive playlist on Spotify with lots of variety, except with morals and priorities instead. Sure, part of suffering in life is navigating value or moral differences when people disagree, but at least we're being who we really are as long as we don't physically hurt or kill eachother.

I need to also note that in history, the idea of moral law (even to regulate other people's spirituality) has been used to justify wars, slavery, Jim Crow, Residential Schools, purity culture, ending Roe V Wade, and even the use of tariffs and "buying Canadian." We're all fighting over whose ruler is the coolest while whose imaginary friend is cooler. You'd think by living in a democratic society we'd have moved past that by now. Nope. This is the suffering we get from trying to make sense of the world while living our lives without injuring our fellow people too much. Maybe it's about time we start making our own decisions about what's good and what's bad, based on what feels right to us, not on ancient set of rules, random podcasts, legacy journalism, pastors, or celebrities that nobody can agree on anymore.

So let's just love and respect each other because we want to, not because this whole moral law thing tells us to. The reason people are sharing memes that say "no one is born racist" or "no one is born a fascist" is because becoming a murderous psychopath is taught by evil murderous psychopaths who became evil from trying to survive in the first place. We were not born in sin. The most evil thing that murderous psychopaths can teach is that doing good things for one's personal survival (rather than harming others) is actually the most evil thing to do because they want to gaslight or control the people beneath them.

Where do these evil people come from? Where does the need to control others come from? It doesn't matter and that's why I'm an agnostic. It doesn't matter because what matters is that we all deeply believe that we don't need some invisible moral police watching us. We all subconciously think on some level that we can still be good people without conforming to the status quo. We can still be friendly and fight for what we think is right without getting all preachy about it or telling those who are outside to do the Romans 10:9 thing. If we really are about power to the people, then even the rules have to be ours. And who knows, maybe without all the fighting over who's got the one true set of moral laws, we'll actually start making a difference.

How Self-Help Screws You Up

When I'm not giving motivational speeches or writing other books, I'm backpacking in Riding Mountain National Park or Lynne Canyon in North Vancouver, or constantly praying and casting out demons at a random Manitoba version of Burning Man. It's all thanks to my patented three step process:
1. Name it.
2. Claim it.
3. Inherit $500K or more from your wealthy parents, aunts, or grandparents to build your brand as a wellness influencer!!

You can achieve anything when your estranged uncle who works for Parks Canada bankrolls you with zero expectations!! And because I never suffered in any real way, that makes me an authority on telling people who work 80s hours a week about how they're not trying hard enough to achieve their dreams.

But why take my word for it? Seriously, that's the question. Why should we listen to people like Tony Robbins or Rachel Hollis or Jordan Peterson or Gary Vaynerchuck? Is it because they live out what they preach? Is it because they put on a good show? Is it because lots and lots of people who crave what they have attend their conferences or chat about how good they are in their webinars? What's the big deal with these folks?

Well, one thing we can all agree with is that self-help instructors have great charisma and can be excellent sales instructors. These people have mastered the art of captivating audiences with their art of persuasion. They know how to come up with quick-fix solutions to health, romantic, and financial problems. They can easily determine the innate desires that everyone has for fulfillment, power, and success. A self-help instructor's carefully crafted magnetic persona gives their followers hope, convincing them that a better life is closer to them than they think it is. However, the promises they make are frequently based on illusions that are hard to discern from reality.

First, self-help celebrities come across as relatable and credible mentors. Many of them love to tell personal stories of overcoming poverty they never actually had or an injury that was a metaphor or bad advice from someone who doesn't even exist (Rich Dad Poor Dad) and then many times even straight-up lie about achieving great heights. Using story is an easy way to connect with individuals who are struggling to figure out their own troubling world around them and by presenting themselves as having faced similar challenges, self-help teachers form an emotional bond with their audience. That bond results in easy sales for their products and services.

Self help gurus have taken time and used their own great skills at communication and teaching to break down complex psychological and philosophical concepts into simple, digestible nuggets of knowledge that can be applied to daily life, which makes self-help concepts seem accessible and acomodating. They also use branding techniques to claim authority while using cute catch-phrases to plant a sense of urgency before a transaction in certain courses or their latest book actually happens.

Second, the fascade of what self-help gurus promise their followers takes account of the human psyche's tendency to employ easy answers and search in intense frustration for quick fixes to problems that can take years to solve (in some cult-recovery groups this is known as the "appeal to the 'crocodile brain'."). The idea that individuals can change their entire lives through the attempting a few simple strategies is interesting and inviting. The teachers in these movements take advantage of this desire by promoting their products as the antidote for all the "preventable" suffering, whether we're talking about a bestselling book that guarantees you'll be millionaire while they take all your money for useless or outdated knowledge, a seminar that promises to transform your relationships while your spouse or crush doesn't recipricate the way a coach indicated they would, or an online course that claims to unlock the secrets of happiness while we wonder why much later we're more angry or extremely depressed weeks later.

This world has a way of building paranoia from a sense of urgency by suggesting that the path to success is time-sensitive, and that their methods are the only way to achieve it quickly. This pressure makes followers of self-help disregard the effort, time, and worst, monetary costs that are required for genuine personal growth. Instead people, who are easily fooled, entitled, and unsatisfied with life as it is, seek immediate gratification through the consumption of self-help material (without even TESTING or APPLYING what these gurus tell them).

Last, the outcomes of self-help advice is usually anecdotal and highly individualized. What works for one person may not work for another. Each individual's outside circumstances, collective environment, relationship with their town's group dynamics, and personalities are unique. However, self-help gurus tend to generalize their experiences and present them as universally applicable truths (while also enhancing those generalizations with concepts like The Secret's idea of manifesting or Grant Cardone's repeated jotting of affirmations). Oversimplification forms unrealistic expectations in followers' minds, while they dismiss the idea of the journey to actual self-improvement being a deeply personal and often arduous process that requires sustained effort and introspection.

The self-help industry survives because of constant transactions, which motivates these leaders to keep their cult dependent on them (because only "they" can fix their problems). The further one goes down the rabbit hole with the same guru, the more that figure pushes sales pitches for more books, courses, or coaching sessions are necessary to achieve the next level of success. Each time a sale's pitch is delivered, the prices on their never-ending demand for their products keeps increasing. The illusion is preserved as long as the follower of the movement continues to hang on with faith that their investment will not return void, despite the evidence of their own lived experiences.

These self-help gurus keep excelling in sales, unlike this book, due to their ability to bond emotionally with their audience, simplify complex issues, and create a sense of urgency and exclusivity around what they're selling. Yet, the promises they make are often based on maxums that don't acknowledge how challenging personal growth is along with the outside circumstances that can influence the overall outcome. While some may find value in their teachings (and even learn some things from people like Mark Manson or Don Miller's concept of story-telling), it is essential for customers and even followers who are deep into personal development to do very deep research on of the background of any self-help teacher and their promises while understanding that actual self-improvement is a personal and continuous journey that cannot be completed within a day, a week, a year, or even a whole decade.

Some of you reading probably know all this, especially if you've gotten out of the game like I have in late 2020. However, there's another conversation that isn't talked about that much outside of MLMs and : how self-help can radicalize people into hatred. It's a very hard topic to articulate, so what I'm going to do is use some critical parts of my overall life story of pursuing money, influence, and a wife, to help get my points across. So buckle in because this probably may be the longest chapter in my manifesto.

How I Got Started

On my 20th birthday (I'm not kidding. I'm talking about the day I turned 20), I was fired from my first telemarketing job for not being able to make any sales. I didn't want any birthday presents because of how mad I was at the working world, but still, one of my uncles who lived in Winnipeg gave me his beat-up 1988 Toyota Corolla. Still in that mode of wanting to be cool, I wanted to drive the car. There was one problem though: I needed money for insurance and repairs to the car.

Even back then after my experiences working at McDonald's, Zellers, and now being fired from one of the worst jobs ever, I knew that working a regular job was only going to be a hard struggle and grind just to have the ability to travel in style. So I asked myself: what can I do to work from home instead of throwing my applications out to companies who will work me until I'm tired but only pay me just enough to keep the car running? Remote work may be a thing now, but I've been wanting to work remote full-time for more than 15 years.

I made a descision days later to make money MY WAY. I wanted to work my own hours. I wanted to handle as little actual cash as possible. I wanted a little bit of control of who my customers were. I wanted to control how much I lift and how long I was on my feet. And most of all, I wanted to be free of micro-management. So in heated desperation, I did a search using "Dogpile.com," which was the Google of the day, and signed up for HerbalLife without doing any further research into the company.

In my stupidity, I was excited! I was going to sell dietary products to random strangers while living with my parents and being mentored by a guy from California named Klaus. I would keep the inventory in my closet. I would take an ad out in the community newspaper and I'd give people the secret to losing 60 pounds while crafting testimonials of my own using "Formula Shakes," salted-protein-bites, and chai-concentrate while exaggerating how it would affect my own personal health.

But deep down, I actually had so many questions. I didn't have much sales experience in my previous jobs. I didn't have the mindset for business or marketing. What do I say if people think HerbalLife is a scam (I sure as hell know now)? What do I say to make a sale? I don't want to learn all this stuff! I just want to make sure I could keep my car running and have money to spend when I hang out with my friends and finish college.

The question I should have asked on my 20th birthday before getting into the prosperity gospel and self-help is this: what are multi-level marketing schemes?

Dating and Confidence

Most people who get into self-help, don't get into it through lack of money like I did. Most men get into self-help by simply wanting to figure out "how to get girls." And I definitely wasn't immune to this mindset.

In 2010, I had a very bad experience with a girl while living in a small town. In desperation again, I bought into two courses that involved "Getting Your Ex Back" and "Seduction Through Texting." While the second course was amazing for a future relationship, it was the first course that started to change how I viewed women, relationships, and heck, even mysoginy. The two courses changed how I viewed women. They taught me how that young girls can easily be controlled and seduced through email or text messages. They taught me that if I say the right things or send certain messages no matter how they feel about me, I can gain power over them. See how courses like this can mess with your head?

So how did courses like this come about? For men, back in the day before self-help became a combination of making money, picking up university or college women, and going to the gym and taking a freezing cold shower afterwards, online dating advice gave a typical message to "be confident in who you are" because simply walking up to girls and saying "hello" in a bar just doesn't work anymore (gee, I wonder why). Some dude came out with a book called "The Game" which encouraged men to show off some kind of talent like card tricks or wear some odd accessory to get girls interested in dating them. By doing this, dating became a puzzle that was easy to solve (find the hidden talent or attractive accessory in puzzle peices, and you get the whole picture of how to get a date once all the pieces are put together).

Eventually, more harsh communication was being sprinked into this message of confidence: messages that men needed to do what they can to be more attactive, dominant, stoic, and to change who they are into what's now called an "alpha-male." The people behind the "alpha-male" messages of online dating advice have discovered a market of lonely men desperate to get married or to just simply lose their virginity. They successfully reached a bunch of men, who were like me back in my 20s, who dropped thousands of dollars, so they can to learn not only confidence, but how to become a hard invincible leader in their spaces. And if men become these "alpha-male" characters, they can date multiple women, not just get married. To these alpha males, women were trophies, prizes to be won, and not interesting, dynamic, and diverse beautiful people to know, understand, love, and empathize with.

In my own life, as a result of taking these two courses, I not only started dating my actual wife after failing to get my ex back, I started to but heads with my female classmates in school, I fought with my girl, and I constantly texted some pretty vulgar things I regret sending to her (no, I did not take pictures of what's in my pants). Very slowly, I wanted to end my relationship (for a lot of reasons outside of self-help), leave Manitoba, and go somewhere to start over, where I could build up my confidence and "alpha-ness" from square one without my past. And of course, being autistic, one of the big reasons I bought into flawed dating advice is because I viewed most relationships as mathematical or formulaic rather than complex with connections and genuine human expression. I still have problems breaking out of this mindset even now that I've become demi-metro-sexual and probably will never date again if my wife kicked the bucket.

The Rise of Darker Forces At Work

The "alpha-male" dating movement began to bleed itself into other areas of hustle-culture, body-building and health, and even wellness spaces for women. After the economic crash of 2008, there were groups of men who were also having a hard time with career changes, mental health, affording basic necessities, and yes, even finding their own identities. Many of the men getting involved with self-help meant well just wanting to be better versions of themselves in a quick dynamically changing world overall. The message went from being confident to bettering yourself overall so you can survive "the real world." Self-help gurus took advantage of this new market of men, especially young men, and used social media, YouTube algorthms, and even physical sports communities like soccer teams and gyms to sell more courses and books to dramatically change mens' lives. The blend seemed to work quite well, but along with my building anger towards the system and women in general, something was also lurking under the shadows of this movement.

After getting married in 2013 and looking into building a music composition business as a side-hustle on Fiverr, I was doing some research on YouTube one day, and noticed an odd video that appeared in the same feed as most of the recommended videos about business, sound design, app development, fitness, dating, and finances. It was a documentary about the dangers of communism. Being curious, I tapped the thumbnail to give it a watch.
The video make scary but interesting claims that communism was slowly making a comeback in the United States. The video had many sources I trusted because of my church upbringing. It interviewed folks like Paul Washer, James Dobson, and even Sean Feuchtt who I met at Calvary

Temple in the late 2000s before he went "viral" during the pandemic. In a panic, I shared the video on social media and described why this video was important to my wife and parents. My dad sat me down afterwards and explained to me why I should question everything I read online and why legacy journalism at the time was better at holding people accountable rather than the church (I will be describing more about how evangelical Christianity had warped my mind to believe this stuff and how I broke out of it in a future book). Long story short, ever since 2014, I've been fact-checking almost every single video I watch, almost all news articles I read, and even now try to form my own opinions with sites like Ground News and podcasts like Canadaland, even if I disagree with many things most sources that I even view or invest in daily articulate.

What I'm trying to say here is that something darker and more sinister was making its way into self-help from a place called the intellectual dark web. Typically one thinks of the dark web as places where people can hire illegal criminals to send viruses or sites to get in touch with Anonymous to hack websites or FTP servers to get files to set up software on an old computer to mine Bitcoin. This kind of stuff is classified as "the deep web (some it's legal and used by governments, but a lot of illegal stuff does go on there). The intellectual dark web can actually be accessed easily through sites like 4chan, different Facebook groups, and even sections of Reddit. The most common way to get information from the intellectual dark web these days is without a doubt through podcasts. Joe Rogan's podcast is one of the biggest spreaders of intellectual dark web material today.

The Intellectual Dark Web is a decentralized network of media personalities like Ben Shapiro, public intellectuals like Sam Harris, and academics like Jordan Peterson who engage in controversial and often politically incorrect discussions that are considered too sensitive or unorthodox for mainstream discourse. This digital alternate reality is characterized by the exchange of ideas that oppose progressive ideologies. It hosts debates on social justice and identity politics to discussions on free speech, political correctness, and the nature of reality itself. The intellectual dark web includes critiques of the any educational methods in STEM reseeach and experimentation, explorations of alternative political and economic theories including what causes poverty and "wokeness," and it turns theories behind self-help on its head with analyses of the psychological underpinnings of human behavior.

The Intellectual Dark Web is seen as a bastion for those who are disillusioned with the echo chambers of traditional media and academic institutions, seeking a platform where intellectual freedom and the pursuit of "truth" are paramount, which is why . Fans of these online spaces claim that the essence of this online movement is the willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, foster open dialogue, and explore the complexities of our world without the constraints of political or ideological dogma. They claim that in these spaces, ideas can freely update themselves and sometimes thrive in the face of opposition, contributing to a vibrant and dynamic intellectual environment that is essential for the advancement of knowledge and understanding in the modern age. And by understanding the "truth" that's found in these spaces, one can escape the status quo and become greater than the "NPCs" who just go about their day and who eventually ruin their own lives.

The reason this is important to why self-help can screw people up is because self-help intersects with extremism due to the the intellectual dark web's common agreement that masculinity and testosterone are the foundation of their ideology. Training in the gym, making lots of money, eating a healthy diet, and being confident are all great qualities of a man, but highest ranking members of the intellectual dark web believe that these qualities are needed to raise up an army incase those "social justice snowflake warriors" start a real civil war or try to take over their country they love. Behind the courses to be healthy, romantic, and rich is a recruitment tool to bring young men not only back to traditional conservatism but to groups that train to become immune to empathy and pain, while learning how to be stone-cold killers

One article, which focuses on fitness and the alt-right pipeline, puts it this way:

"*The intersection of extremism and fitness leans into a shared obsession with the male body, training, masculinity, testosterone, strength, and competition. Pyscial fitness training, especially in combat sports, appeals to the far-right for many reasons: fighters are trained to accept significant physical pain, to be "warriors," and to embrace messaging around solidarity, heroism, and brotherhood. It's championed as a tool to help fight the "coming race war" and the street battles that will precede it. Recruits are encouraged to link individual moral virtues such as willpower, decisiveness, and courage, with desired collective traits such as virility and manliness. This works in reverse, with white supremacists encouraging potential recruits or activists to stay in good physical shape as a way of self-presentation to the public.*

...Intertwining those feelings with hateful dehumanizing ideas, while promoting the concept that physical warriors are needed to create the strength and dominance to defend one's people from a perceived enemy, makes for a dangerous powerful cocktail of radicalization."

Now am I saying that in themselves, going to the gym, making money, and being a romantic is fascist? Hell, no! While the left wants people to think that your gym down the street has fitness coaches that are training Nazis or soldiers for ICE, most local gyms have trainers that are actually quite helpful. My problem is that there are some people who go to the gym because they subconciously feel they're going to be dominated by people who make them uncomfortable, and that should be no reason to be a healthy person. That's a self-esteem problem. And those with self-esteem problems who go to the gym because they don't want to be bullied anymore can easily get sucked into the intellectual dark web pipeline, believing any conspiracy theory that minorities, especially blacks, Jews, and women just wanting to survive, are out to destroy and replace them, and that the Left will end the world. They don't want to be bullied anymore, and by both training to be fit and listening to podcasts that are dark web influenced, they go from being bullied to become the paranoid bully who will beat anyone who doesn't agree with them into submission while recruiting other men to their cause.

How I Went Deep

In late-2015, I started an app flipping business that lasted me for a while until I had to get a regular job in 2017. My wife and I bought a house, we rented out our basement, and everything seemed to be fine until our lives became so stressful in 2019 that we had to quit our jobs to preserve our mental health. We sold our house, moved into my parent's basement and tried to start again with our own side-hustles. We got into self-help culture and I moved deeper into the rabbit hole than she did. I still held onto that hope in meritocracy that I was going to make an epic comeback and prove all my haters that I had since high school wrong.

Before I share how I got our, I need to explain a few things: Conservatives in the self-help movement see the outcome of people's lives, whether it be success or failure, as a direct result of their choices, beliefs, and implementation of personal responsibility, not reality-based systemic issues or outside circumstances. I realized that self-improvement, that is done poorly without an understanding of the real world, can often lead insecure men to having a false sense of superiority. When a man in self-help compares himself to how other men in his life are doing or compares himself to the guru that he follows, that feeling or false superiority (or even just the basic belief in meritocracy) can be powerful for men who try so hard and fail. The story of their heroes who get up, fight, and win, give them a strange assurance that if they work hard, they can still make it. But as the old statement goes: just because one person wins the lottery, doesn't mean that we all can win the lottery.

There are many outside circumstances that need to be factored in when improving yourself life; things like living in the right city, having the people in your network that can mentor or work with you, being where the job or demand is for passions and skills you have, and having people or organizations that can support you if you fail. Some men also have more willpower, patience, and determination. Despite how strong or weak they are, they have characteristics and privilege to keep going while a lot of other men don't have these things and just go back to living a regular life. That's just what happens.

The other issue with this feeling of superiority is that men see certain forms of success as the be-all and end-all or purpose and life itself. That feeling of superiority leads men to do anything to be "the best person" even if they lose their loved ones, people who help them, or they sell things they need for that "secret" to bring them success. Going down this road in self-improvement leads to the point where unhealthy men admire power for the sake of power (not how that power is used to make the world a better place). This is unfortunately why men start to believe in and follow extremists or strongmen personalities like Nick Fuentes, Charlie Kirk, Tucker Carlson, and even very extreme alpha-bros like Ihman Ghazi and Andrew Tate. They believe they have the power of Russia, China, or North Korea, and they can do anything and everything to be like "the most powerful rulers" on earth; "if Trump or Putin can be so powerful, so can I, right?"

We're in a place now where influential men can do really messed up things, and yet regular men still admire them just because they're aggressive, powerful, charismatic, great communicators, and I have no idea how else to say this; they're badasses who don't give a fuck. This attitude comes from a perspective of a populist view of the world that is trapped in a myth. The myth they are trapped in is that our world rewards the people who are "the best."

I wish I realized all this sooner. I was determined to be the best, to work so hard from 2020 on to get my wife a better house, a car, build a business that would bring in 7-figures, and even lift weights while doing some stretches to avoid further back injuries. And when things failed for us, I would take out my rage by yelling at her. I would blame her for not helping me or supporting my dreams. I would blame my church for lack of resources. I would tell people who disagreed with me that Jordan Peterson, Tony Robbins, and Grant Cardone got to where they were because they knew something was wrong with the system and they did something to take care of themselves while everything collapsed and that I would do the same thing.

Getting Out

Eventually a few months into the pandemic, my wife told me my attitude was too much to bare and she threatened to leave me. I woke up to a hard truth, broke down, and started bawling. Even if I tried to do self-help without believing the dark web's conspiracy theories while trying to fight for everyone's rights, I was still becoming a hot-headed angry "alpha-male" with insecurity issues.

I realized how privileged I was, despite my struggles with autism being part of the cause of my current situation. All through our turbulent relationship, my wife worked very hard at a traditional job while I gave it my all to support us, failed, and kept trying to figure out what to do when I needed to ask for help in the first place. My retired parents who worked in computers and micro-biology took us in when the pandemic got difficult. My brother-in-law was a guarentor whenever we needed a place to stay. My sister-in-law even with three kids took us in when we didn't have a home and both went back to school to upgrade our degrees. And I gained enough life experience to write this whole book thanks to my wife and our supportive families. If we were completely alone or living in a trashy trailer or on the street, we'd probably be dead by now.

We live in a world, a really really messed up world, where the rich just keep getting richer, and people like me and my wife are constantly teetering on the edge of poverty no matter how hard we try to make changes in our lives. And I know we're not alone in this. Even friends and family who work six figures are complaining that no matter how hard they work or no matter what they do, they feel like they can barely keep their heads above water. It's gotten so bad that people into self-help aren't even learning about how to help themselves. They're just learning who to be afraid of, who's powerful, and what conspiracy or enemy needs to be exposed next while ignoring the real conspiracy of a failed economic system...called hyper-unregulated-capitalism (something that these gurus and teachers think is the natural state of human existence). That's why self-help has now become a huge hyper-captistist scam that is part of the system.

Capitalism isn't the only system that exists. There are many parts of the world that are living well and reaching basic self-actualization due to free healthcare, housing, and college. There are alternative ways we can live and have lived in the past without doing the "dog eat dog" thing. Sadly, we are stuck fighting for that world while living in a world, fighting for a loaf of bread, where its every man for himself even though he wants a completely different life. The balance of hard work to achievements in this society is not proportionate at all. Yes, my parent's generation still struggled and work hard, however, back in the day, wages grew with inflation while their jobs were more stable and secure. We don't live in a world like that anymore and no matter what policies Trump, or Mark Carney, or Pierre Pollievre put forward, sign, or pass through legistlature, it's not going to bring that nostalgic life back. We are stuck in this apocolyptic new normal unless the entire system, including self-improvement, is replaced with something else.

At worst, self improvement can start with very simple searches for "how to get girls," "how to make more money," and "how to fix poor gut health or back problems," but when viewing enough self-improvement content on YouTube or listening to podcasts by Joe Rogan or [insert other examples] for a few months to over a year, it can lead young men on a journey to become the superior ultimate life form instead of just being themselves. From there, men can get sucked into intellectual dark web content where men develop mysoginist attitudes towards "boss-babes" at work, where men believe that Jews will replace them, that social justice warriors need to be shot by Kyle Rittenhouse in the town next door, or [insert other examples]. At worst, self-help can teach men to look up to power for the sake of power. Self help can encourage men to see power as the ultimate goal (as something worth sacrificing everything for) which leads to biological determinist views that align with eugenics and body fascism (and pretty much hatred for anyone or any ideology that has nothing to do with being straight, white, or a "real" American).

At best, self improvement still can help men build strength, discipline, confidence, enrich relationships, build emotional intellegence, and lead to better health if they eat right. It can be a tool for men to survive no matter what external circumstances come up. It can also give folks who oppose the system the energy they need to fight fascism while helping marginalized folks bring progressive changes to our society. A gym in Los Angeles called Southpaw not only teaches amazing martial arts, but they also help their students organize their unions, give food to people who needed it, and protest peacefully for rights and necessities like social housing or safe places for immigrants who are still trying to obtain citizenship. This self-improvement, if connected with good men similar to Mr. Miyagi from The Karate Kid, can keep both men and women from being gaslit or brainwashed into admiring wealthy, powerful, or influential people while also using its strength to take back countries from the worst rulers or billionaires who stole them from the people. Self improvement, if tweaked for the better, can help all of us focus on working together to build a better world rather than being an individualist tool, used simply just for survival.

Let's quickly circle back to my time at HerbalLife where this journey for me all began. AFter I put out my first Herbal-Life advertisement in the local paper, an old man called my parents. My dad picked up the phone and the old man asked to talk to me. I rushed over excited! I was about to make my first sale with my first customer and use the cash I made to pay off my car insurance and then move out on my own. I grabbed the phone from my dad and the old man asked me "Your ad in the paper...does it work?" I froze. My brain shutdown or short-circuited. My mouth went completely dry and I hung up the phone. The next day, I sent the inventory I had back to Klaus and quit Herbal Life before going back to college.

Sex Isn't Appealing

For a long time, the age-old marketing tip "Sex sells" has been a staple of advertising in media. It's still quite effective today. However, with the emergence of Generation Z, there was a dramatic shift in not just their overall purchasing habits but also what captures their attention. The kids today are in a place where they're questioning the traditional portrayal of sex in advertising and media which is causing a much needed change in societal attitudes towards sexuality. While there is still a persistent presence of porn or sex in advertising, Gen-Z isn't rushing to lose virginity because of peer pressure or because they saw a suggestive music video or YouTube ad.

Gen Z is characterized by their digital savviness, their ability to filter out which content or social media posts to view and which content or posts to avoid, and exposure to diverse perspectives. As a result, unless we're talking about men in the self-help world as outlined in a previous chapter, they are less likely to be led astray by sexually explicit content as a means to sell products or ideas. They have grown up in an era where they can access vast amounts of information and content at their fingertips, making them more discerning as to what to view and what to filter out. Sexually explicit advertisements and sex scenes in movies are now seen as outdated and lacking creativity to this generation, which values authenticity and inclusivity. Gen Z is more aware of the potential negative impacts of objectification and sexualization, leading to a demand for more ethical marketing that resonates with their socially conscious ideologies. They would rather buy products and invest in services that match their personal beliefs and lifestyles, while being less inclined to support brands that focus on people being exploited or at worst trafficked for entertainment.

The other reason I believee sex is becoming less and less appealing is because a lot of people 40 and older, conservatives, and many pastors who are caught in sexual adultery keep preaching that pro-creation is the primary and only biological foundation of sex. But many people find meaning for sexuality individually as they struggle with hormones and masturbation in their teens, randomly hook up or get into dating relationships in their 20s, or if they grow up in church and wait until marriage, find out awkwardly that they either at best, they want sex more for pleasure instead of having kids after the first experience (or at worst, having traumatic sexual experiences from the lack of time, autonomy, and agency to figure out their own sexual identity before the wedding night). Sex for every single person can have multiple meanings from intimacy, pleasure, emotional bonding, and for many men who are cold psychopaths, a need to gain power.

The notion that sex is solely for reproduction is increasingly challenged in modern societies. Gen Z, in particular, is growing up in a world where discussions about sexual health, consent, and sexuality are becoming less shameful. They are exposed to various sexual orientations, identities, and expressions, which contribute to a more nuanced view of sex. This shift in perception is reflected in their media consumption, where a lot of the content they see is sex-positive, informative, and respectful of personal boundaries rather than taboo or "sacred." This broader understanding of sex's purpose is actually contrasting to classic marketing strategies that solely utilize sex for commercial gain and creates a disconnect which may soon bring society to a place where prostitution, sex work, and porn will be struggling industries economically.

Not only that, but when most people argue using science, evolution, or playing the god card, they use the common formula of "sex leading to offspring" as definitive proof that sex is a smart, purposeful design, to keep the circle of life spinning (for this to be a fact, it has to clear some pretty high fact-checking standards). To me, it doesn't matter how one uses arguments to get to the epiphany that the purpose of sex is pro-creation: sex as an act of procreation isn't exactly a great design, even when excluding acts like oral sex, anal, etc. There are medical scientific studies and fertility books that show that unprotected cis-hetero straight up penis vagina ejaculation of sperm into the uterus sex, at its most effective around the time of ovulation, has around a 25% chance of leading to pregnancy. The rest of the time, the odds of pregnancy, as an average, drop down to 5%. So if the purpose of sex is pro-creation, and when people have sex 75% percent of the time it doesn't lead to pregnancy (and we also have to factor in miscarriages, eggs that don't implant, and other complications), how is that held high as a smart design for reproduction to keep a species going? It's like coding a video game and passionately arguing that playing the game is going to be fun 25% of the time, while people hilariously only have fun 5% of the time playing it. The argument that sex is only for pro-creation falls apart in this case so sexually active people have to figure out what sex means outside of having kids.

I grew up in the 90s when sex was so taboo but it was so thrilling to get into foreplay and masturbating. But once I lost the V card, it took a while before I actually reached orgasm in intercourse. Ever since then, I slowly started to figure out how stupid the American Pie movies were along with how over-rated "getting laid" actually was. I slowly realized that both Christians and Hollywood are blantantly lying to us when it comes to not only how taboo sex is, but how wild, amazing, and beautiful sex is. Some Christians believe that if one waits for marriage, they'll have amazing sex in the bedroom while Hollywood and porn paint a picture of sex as the ultimate natural amusement park ride that beats every other kind of fun. There is some truth that sex feels great, but when sexual activity between the same two (or more) people continues over time, it becomes less and less thrilling.

I believe that many Gen-Z teens and young adults, sexually active or not, learn this quickly at a younger and younger age which presents another right-wing lie: that no one gets this and can easily be seduced into non-marital sex. As a result, birth control becomes more of a priority, anyone under 30 puts their focus on anything besides dating, relationships, and marriage, and less people want to have children. It's so much easier to see the lies that Hollywood, the church, and even many natalists are telling us.

Despite all that, the only ones who are now stuck in that feedback loop of wanting to "get laid" are men into self-help as outlined in the previous chapter. And of course, they're panicking when it comes to being constantly rejected by girls in America or they try to date women from traditional countries who still don't understand everything I'm discussing here. There's even a trend now where young adults would rather hang out at the park without any agenda to hook up with someone. Really, young adults get together to keep being kids since our economy is so messed up (even though some very rare encounters here and there may possibly result in one night stands). Maybe that's why the only folks that are having lots of kids right now are religious, conservative, or sadly, marginalized couples who can't get birth control.

While I do empathize with the kids who got to this place, I do have a wish that more young people will start to fall in love again, not to engage in amazing sex or to get married and have a family, but to simply be together, to enjoy each other's company, to be thankful that they have an oppurtunity to enjoy being deeply connected in this system that's slowly trying to break the sanity of ordinary people.

In a way, falling in love is the most rebellious thing we can do in a world that's all about conformity and fitting in. It turns a couple's world upside-down giving adventure and meaning to a life filled with work, chores, taxes, and bills to pay. It's a life where people can stop feeling like we have to watch how the stock market is doing to feeling like we're living a life as if we're skydiving without a parachute. We're living a feeling where every second counts and it's all because of that one person we're crazy about. It's not just about us individually; it's about a deep connection with another human that's more important than anything else.

What's important here is that love messes with the status quo. Love, in a way, can gum up the system. The economy's all about everyone buying useless trash and being "productive," but when in love, being with that special person is more important than studying for a big exam or trying to close a deal with an investor. And let's face it, romance novels, romantic comedies, porn, and harlequin novels have got nothing compred to living our own exclusive love stories.

Politics? Forget it. When in love, it's hard to see the appeal of fighting for some abstract thing like a country when all that matters is personal happiness. And cultures? They're full of rules that tell us who to love and how to love. But love doesn't care. Love is a wild animal that breaks free from its cage and does its own thing, no matter what everyone else is doing.

Love is a super-power that is a huge component in helping one determine their values in life. Is it about decorum or playing it safe? Or is it about going after what sets your heart on fire while everyone lives in fear of rocking the boat? Real love is so intense that the people who are passionate about working 9-5 and obeying petty rules get scared when someone's living for love because it's so intense and real.

If you're reading this and you need something to fight for, think of the people in your life who you, at least, like the most. We can't let love get buried under all the rules and expectations the system puts on us. We need to make the world a place where love can grow naturally, like a wildflower, not some sad little thing in a plastic pot that comes from Dollarama. We should all be striving to find love in everything we do, whether it's with another person, our dreams, or just life in general.

Perhaps love isn't something we can just decide to feel, but we can shape our lives so that love can be easier to find and hold onto. We need to start questioning the appeal of sex, pro-creation, great replacement theories, and natalism, and just live for genuine human connections we truly want. Imagine if everyone did that? Imagine everyone stopped trying to push sex through advertising or regulating it through purity culture or using self-help to control love? The world would be brighter, full of love and excitement instead of just going through the motions or working, watching TV, over-eating, playing mindless video games, and having sex. We'd all be living like it's the last day of summer camp, making every moment count because we know we're living for something authenthic and amazing.

So let's all dare to love, to want what we really value, and to not be afraid of what people think. That's not sexual revolution, it's an actual real revolution. Because love isn't just some fluffy thing or a head over heels stomach turning thing. Love is a force of nature that can change everything. And who knows, maybe if we all did that, the world will change so that love will be the goal and sex will just become another natural act as a result of love and consent.

We Don't Need to Have Kids

My wife and I have decided never to have kids. There I said it. Get it? Got it! Good. I'm going to describe why in a bit, but I'd like to go over a few thoughts.

I feel the system has a way of forcing complicated and extremely conflicted advice when it comes to sexuality and family planning. Part of the problem is that our entire world completely flipped when it comes to how we view sexuality, free love, and having children. In the 1970s, boomers were freaking out over their girls taking birth control pills, but now, men are terrified that they can't have children or leave a legacy because of #MeToo protests and women wanting more independence. As outlined in the self-help chapter, young men are quickly being grifted into much more harmful conservative and mysoginist ideologies while women with established careers who want to date are having a hard time finding good men because all the young boys are into Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson.

But what frustrates me the most about what flipped is that young people born before 2005 are pushed to abstain from any sexual activity by parents, teachers, and mega-church pastors. But then once the kids grow up, they focus on careers, forming relationships around hobbies, and using technology with screens, but no dating. Those same parents, pastors, and teachers eventually get frustrated with the kids they mentored wondering why they don't feel ready to settle down or put rings on. It is discouraging and confusing for young people and married couples without children (whether they want kids or not) to hear that they did what their caregivers wanted and waited to lose their virginity, but either struggle to have a satisfying sex life while being blind-sided by the unique conflicts that show up while raising diverse children.

Today, Gen Z is being forced like cattle to sacrifice their personal choices, autonomy, desires, and even their beliefs to give older generations grandkids. It's a disgusting abomination. Everyone born after 1980 has been having a hell of a time trying to keep a career, make friends with people who will accept them as they are, try to stay healty post 2020, do hobbies they couldn't do as a kid because parents never supported them or they were too poor, and now, these old living relics want the next generation to mix fire and gasoline by bringing a child into a post-capitalist society? That is bloody insane! Period.

So where do these ideas come from?

They stem from the belief that having biological children is required to be part of a social group. And while I'll be cover the religious influence later in this chapter, society in itself doesn't want to remove religions from society because of these natalist ideas. I believe "the system" (governments, the economy, corporations, and the police state) NEED the nuclear family in order for society to function.

The powers that be in this society, religion and even many forms of conspirituality being some of them, affect how the system is organized. The system in this society tells us that the family is a place to receive love and emotional fulfillment. Intimate love and connection, according to the system, can ONLY be found in a nuclear family structure. When a child becomes an adult or graduates college and gets a job, they are encouraged to leave the family they grew up with and form a family of their own. They are told to get married and have children of their own.

But why "the nuclear family?" The nuclear family is a widely accepted structure in the system. It's still the default family discussed when teaching school children (at least where I live in mid-western Canada). Most family and marriage laws in every branch of government surround the nuclear family because corporations and capitalism NEEDS the "nuclear family" in order to keep itself going. This is why companies and centre to far-right polititians don't go after churches.

The nuclear family is a perfect mechanism for producing obedient workers. Those workers will marry other workers and create more workers which result in dividing us up into families to create competition in capitalism. This preserves the life-cycle of the consumerist culture we have today and as a result, families compete with each other instead of working together as a collective to help each other.

The man in the family is the head of the household (another subject I'll cover in a later chapter). Hierarchy and male authority are normalized and conditioned into the family. This systemic approach to forming families leads to the normalization of sexism and inequality between men, women, and children. Women are encouraged to stay home and raise the children unpaid while men go to work. Raising children in this framework of the nuclear family gives capitalism the workers needed to uphold the status quo.

As a result of certain "assigned" roles in the system's version of the family, the system is permitted to police sexuality within society. Family is one of the first social structures used to reject marginalized individuals in the LGBTQA+ community. A philosopher (forgot his name) once said that "heterosexuality is a politically assisted pro-creation technology." In other words, if a certain kind of sexuality in the system doesn't produce workers for capitalism, it must be outlawed. That's why the people in the system want to get rid of birth control, not just to end abortions. It's about ensuring that capitalists, billionaires and fortune 500 corporations don't run out of staff!

Heterosexuality being embossed into law is only ONE WAY for the government and the church combined to police the sexuality of the proletariat. It's also a way to police how individuals, espeically women with goals and ambitions, want to live their lives. It's a way the system tries to regulate how we socilize and how the system itself builds social structures. If we're stuck with this kind of family being the only kind of family structure of the system, then it is going to result in more violence, more inequality, more abuse, and more moral panics and culture wars.

Purity Culture and Religious Pressure

Let's break some of these ideas down further.
I believe that some of these toxic ideas come from purity culture and the need to breed Anglo-Saxon white Christians. Purity culture is an idea that was first created by eugenicist turned child-psychologist James Dobson. While he doesn't call it that, Mr. Dobson believed that if teenagers and young adults stayed "pure" before getting married, a nation as a whole will not only be prosperous and strong, but also only have the "right kind of people" contributing to its flourishing. Racist and ableist commentary aside, the only way Dobson believed this perfect society can be formed was for the system in general to make marriage an important milestone by turning it into a commercial racket.

Religions pushed this hard, but society in general also had a hand in it. They threatened both boys and girls with sex education that basically said that life will be ruined if teens became sexually active before courtship while making sure women were pregnant soon after getting married. While they did mention some truths behind STDs, aids, emotional distress, rape, and unwanted pregnancies, the parents of the 50s to the 90s also lied by saying most marriages will be stable and satisfying with mutual respect and commitment if kids did all the right things society told them to do. The media was also influenced by purity culture but in a different way. Porn and Hollywood's film industry added more sexual inneuendo in its films along with explicit nudity and sex scenes in order to encourage kids to eventually become sexually active (even if kids didn't want to or were asexual). Young people still got married because their parents wanted them to, but still, divorce rates continually climbed decade after decade while more and more kids don't want to grow up to have more babies.

While boomers continually say that marriage is amazing, in my view of a lot of marriages around me, women either always lead men when they don't want to be lead while constantly be-rating or yelling at them, while men have at least a few times emotionally abused women while the worst ones were physically abusive. So is being married the problem or is it that the now grown-up kids who were raised on all the ideas I outlined are stuck in unhappy marriages, since they were rushed into it, and now they're mad because they're stuck with an imperfect partner and kids they don't want?

I think forcing anyone towards marriage and pressuring them to have a family brings out the worst in relationships today. There seems to be this focus on fearing the loss of family legacy or "good ol fashion family values." The kids that grew up with promises of a #blessed life are struggling and barely keeping it together, while the privileged families with actual happy marriages still have many problems, but their focus is not on what they fear, but on continued growth as a family, mutual respect, and informed consent.

When I used to go to church, I got to ride with a couple of guys to a men's retreat in 2014 where there were activities such as fishing, canoeing, hunting, and carving wooden objects. If I had the tools, I'd participate in the last activity, but for most of the weekend, I sat in my cabin with a Gameboy Advanced. The conversation I had with the two men in the car was what we planned to do in terms of having kids. At the time, I wanted a son at the time. The driver shared with me that he and his wife made a decision a few years ago not to have any children. I didn't ask him for the details, but I thought of that conversation often every few years.

The more I thought about it, the more I asked myself: why is the societal expectation for marriage to naturally lead to procreation? And why is it that when it doesn't happen (or worse, nothing happens when couples try), questions and concerns about the health of the marriage and the couple's commitment to traditional values always end up in an uncomfortable conversation? Do parents born in the 1940s to the 1970s not understand how appalling this is for couples who have made (or HAVE TO make) the deliberate choice not to have children for personal, financial, or environmental reasons, or due to medical challenges? Do Christians and natalists understand the double-standards and hypocrisy that is found in going from advocating for abstinence one year, to questioning the absence of children in the next? Or are they so blinded by their conservatism that their nightmares of a chaotic dying society, where everyone has public orgies on condom littered street corners of Portage and Main Street, keep them up at night?

God's Will or Fear?

Another reason it's horrible to have kids is because most people who push the idea are doing it with the intent on breeding Christians to outbreed non-believers. These falsehoods intersect with some current ideas regarding "real Americans" having children to outbreed those so-called "scary immigrants coming from China and Mexico." It also amazes me that in these circles, having kids as part of a lifestyle is taken for granted, especially within evangelical Christian groups. Most people attending a church assume that if a man and a woman get married, there's a high percent chance they will have children (yet pregnancy happens only 5% of the time hetero-couples have sex). In most churches, the only purpose of sex is primarily for pro-creation. The creation of new life is one of the driving forces behind the institution of American Christian marriages and the nuclear family (the "God-ordained" social model of conservative religion, society, and human relationships), even though most couples only get married to get their extended families to approve of them pursuing a long term relationship. And yet, considering how many men have wives and concubines and children with multiple women, the Bible doesn't even push for American marriage or nuclear families at all. The reason I shared my story about the man who drove me to the retreat is to illustrate this exact idea; that at the time especially in church, society views "not having kids" as a complete annomoly that can easily catch regular adults off-guard. Because usually, no childless married couple will tell the world out loud that they'll never have kids.

When the conversation usually comes up that a married couple refuses to have children, the conversation never ends well. Couples who chose never to have kids were described as self-ish, too career focused, they're doing something sinful or wrong, or at worst, from a Christian perspective, focused on the world and not spiritual things at all. And this is all left unsaid. While it's true that my wife wants to focus on her career, my reason for not wanting kids is that a disabled autistic man who can easily break his back, a man full of trauma and anxiety, and a man with a warped short-term memory and a hard time keeping a job, should never be a parent. I would like a child, and if I had the cash, I would adopt, but I'll never be able to raise them the way I want to (not in terms of discipline and providing wisdom, but in terms of giving them their basic needs).

When my wife and I told my parents all this, we saw first-hand how swift and uncompromising this idea was that could never be questioned. Mom claimed divine mandate and authority by throwing a hissy-fit and scolded us about how we were acting outside of God's will while throwing out verses about being fruitful and multiplying and that children are a blessing etc. My wife had a panic attack and from that day forward, we made sure to keep our distance from her as much as possible. It's also one of the reasons why whenever I need to talk to them, I talk to dad first. My dad understands my disabilities and how financially difficult it was for us when it comes to even entertaining the idea of having kids.

As I outlined earlier, the whole idea behind having kids and a family is about control. Living like other people do in the system is about control, but in this case, it's all about obeying religion and a capitalist system to add future generations to the work-force (I mean, c'mon. Why else are some states in the US bringing child labour back?). This idea of having kids is not simply about belief that children are a blessing or that the family is a divine institution. The policing of couples having children or not covers the most intimate comprehensive dimensions of meaning behind family, relationships, sexuality, gender, desire, economics, and human existence. In other words, the system, not just churches, indirectly tells us that if heterosexual married couples are not having children, they are considered criminals (and of course if one is LGBTQA+, the system believes the individual is filth because their non-conformity to eugenics and gender norms). People who don't have children aren't just abnormal, they stand outside of a typical intention for shared community in Western society.

Are We Being Replaced?

This also touches on another unspoken rule in many US churches and conspiritual groups: couples are obligated to have as many kids as they can successfully raise, so they can convert as many as they can into the Christian faith or far-right ideologies. Think about this: why is it that Catholics, Mormons, Latter Day Saints, or churches like Plymouth Brethren are known for larger families? Why do body fascists oppose birth control or the morning-after pill? Besides pain, why do many moms dislike "unatural things" like diaphrams inserted into their vaginas. It seems to me that not only are these ideas based on religion, but they are very nationalist, racist, and focused on avoiding a "great replacement."

What do I mean? Vice president JD Vance brought a collection of fringe culture war ideas into the mainstream that call for Christians all over the US and Canada to have kids. His Catholic fringe nationalist ideas merged with Protestant Christian ideas about having kids even though most Protestant families could only have one or two children per family. What are those ideas and why do most Christians these days care about them?

For one thing, Christianity has a belief that the growth of the church happens through conversion (or getting people to join the church so its membership grows). According to the Bible, specifically Romans 10:9, no one is born a Christian. A person has to decide to give their heart to Jesus Christ and confess lordship over their life in order to be "born again" and have a relationship with him. Some say conversion is about bringing your best friend to church on Sunday and encouraging them to join you up front during an alter-call (a process of winning converts according to Protestant tradition). That's just one way to do what's called "The Great Commission" (or going out into the world to make disciples of Christ). The perfect way for Christians, especially Americanized Christian churches, to measure how well a church is doing, is by figuring out its continued growth in terms of how many new people are converted to Christianity on a weekly basis. When churches grow this way, this is known as spiritual church growth.

But there's another way for the church to grow, since "spiritual church growth" isn't working much these days. This other method is so disgusting to me looking back at all the gas-lighting and all the sales and all the conditioning that was done to me in my childhood that made me the maladjusted adult I am today. I'm talking about the method of biological church growth, which is the process of a Christian man and woman having kids and raising them in fundamentalist teachings; whether it's through Sunday school, reading Bible stories, teaching them biblical traditions, baptism, etc. Eventually, this primes the kids to make a decision to give their hearts to Jesus without hesitation (Proverbs 22:6). Or they become the opposite and morph into an entitled Sheldon Cooper.

Why am I bringing up religion here? Because these ideas are bleeding outside the church. In the past, prosperity gospel churches and other conservative churches were growing while mainline churches are not (an example of a mainline church is the Episcopal church who has Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde as a leader). But recently, the tables have slowly turned in that mainline churches are growing a bit while many many of the big churches are now shrinking since Donald Trump was elected in 2016. While I could get into Christians deconstructing or trends where they became what are called ex-vangelicals like myself, the point is that conservative churches aren't winning converts like they did back in the 1980s to the early 2010s. So they had to turn to biological church growth to keep churches going. But there's another problem: birth rates are declining even among white Protestants. This means there aren't many new Christians coming into church to replace church members leaving or dying. Church leaders and conservatives who support Christianity are pushing Christian married couples to have kids because their numbers are declining. The declining birth rate concern among Christians became a mainstream voice that was loud and eventually picked up by intellectual dark web figures like some of Joe Rogan's guests on his podcast.

My other thought behind this is that JD Vance's fringe ideas are also a signal to Christians who are into conspiracy theories, white supremacy, and Christian nationalism. Declining church rates to some of these folks are also due to shifts in American and Canadian culture as well as people with diverse nationalities joining and shaping the ideologies of conservative churches. The racist Christians who are seeing these shifts are easily suckered into believing the language of white replacement theory (the racist idea that coloured people are breeding like rabbits to try to replace white people and that in response, white people need to outbreed them). They believe that not only whites will be replaced, but that they are being spiritually attacked by anyone who is not a straight white neurotypical protestant American-supporting Christian. And thanks to many Joe Rogan interviews, Christian sermons and podcasts, and Fox News segments, JD Vance's ideas of lonely cat ladies, and families without kids being useless have become a mainstream Christian nationalist vision for America, which has created a moral panic among white conservatives in America.

The racialized notion that white folks have an obligation to "perpetuate" the human race through birth has been fused with Christian nationalism into a Protestant conservative ideology of having children before DEI takes over, and by then "it's too late." So in response, the most privileged whitest married couples do what they can to have as many kids as possible to preserve their messed up authoritarian ideology. The idea of Christian couples having kids has gone from being a duty of the system to becoming an act of war which is also another reason why Roe VS Wade was overturned.

Putting the Web Together

So to add all this up, discouragement of sex before marriage and forcing women into "war" by making them give birth to unwanted children have profound impacts on the mental health and well-being of young adults especially women and quite a few non-binary individuals. Feelings of confusion, guilt, and inadequacy are always brought up in therapy, especially for those who struggle with reconciling their personal beliefs with societal norms in countries that preach "rugged individualism" while encouraging so-called "collective participation" in society.

In high control environments with this natalist mindset, conversations about consent, sexual health, family planning, and contraception are not just avoided, but completely taboo. It cements harmful ideas that boys will be boys, and that girls need to wait and remain virgins, while their bodies are their husband's choice after the wedding. This leaves our kids today unprepared to make informed decisions, not just about their bodies, but their overall long-term financial, medical, and relationship goals.

The cycle will just continue if we all just start randomly having kids, raising them with "Judeo-Christian values," and then complain when the world changes wondering why the kids never grow up to become "great" or "successful." The reason not everyone deserves to be parents is because the parents who want to raise miniture versions of themselves will most likely raise rebels who turn out to be the exact opposite of who they want their kids to be. Good parents will eventually let kids decide for themselves how their lives are going to be lived once they've turned 18. Authentically protecting children involves giving them the autonomy to form their own identities and ideologies while letting them live out their own lives, whether the parents agree with the lives lived or not. Even if parents won't allow that, kids will figure out a way, and if they can't, the result may be suicide.

A highly recommended solutiuon to all this is to promote a balanced and comprehensive approach to sex education and family planning while allowing every person to make their own choices regarding children. It has happened and there's no turning back no matter what the conservative evangelical USA does to try and raise birth rates again. Since the internet became accessible to the public in the 90s, more accurate information about contraception, consent, communication in sexual relationships, and respecting the diverse choices individuals make regarding their reproductive lives are coming out (while conspiracies surrounding sexual fear also escalated since the mid-2000s). More progressive schools and churches offered guidance that is reflective of their values and ideologies while encouraging their attendants to think for themselves. But since the second term of Donald Trump, most of these ideas were toss out the window...all because the few people who actually whole-heartedly support him and his ideas are afraid of being replaced by different but ordinary people, just like me, who are simply trying to make it to tomorrow.

Instead of asking why young people aren't having kids today, maybe we need to ask them how many kids they want and what do they need to raise healthy children. And if they can't or don't want to have kids, what kind of a life will be the best for their mental health, physical well-being, and what kind of relationships they can have that don't necessarily involve mutual children. We're at a cross-raods when it comes to times changing. We need to embrace whatever change is coming especially when it comes to whether or not future generations can have or not have children. It is a much better way to protect the children, than the job we're doing right now.

The problem has always been the need for control. My mom has always told me that the system and Christ promises freedom. But when hi-control religious leaders or conservative politicians promise freedom, the privileged get the benefits and spread the message while poor people suffer with unwanted kids or children struggle with becoming good members of society. Just another case justifying why the "freedom" conservatives love is realistically a prison for everyone else.

We Want to Work and Live A Good Life

It's amazing how rich company owners love to push the idea that "no one wants to work anymore." Because of that messaging, more and more regular people seem to judge each other as lazy and incompetent. But when I check on social media platforms like Reddit, so many people are having issues job hunting and they still want to work. So in a sense, calling everyone lazy is a horrible argument.

Here's what the problem is: there are both unemployed individuals in every single city and town, along with a bunch of job openings that no one's talking about. I am aware that this sometimes screams "we're all lazy", however, our discourse barely touches on the gig economy. More and more people are starting to turn their skills into part-time to casual side-hustles to bring in money while trying to find a more stable full-time job. There are also quite a few people who are able to go as far as to start their own businesses while excelling at keeping up with the job market that's always changing.

People are also hunting for jobs that match what they're passionate about. They want to do something they're good at instead of doing a job they'll easily be let go from like their parents and grandparents did. This doesn't make job hunters lazy, it puts priority on being free to live a full life while also valuing balance, autonomy, self-awareness, and self-esteem, all on top of bringing in a decent income.

The hilarious idea that laziness is the only reason for work ethic not being as good as it used to be comes from a place of really high privilege. This is because the idea doesn't really account for how complicated work and motivation are. There are lots of factors that could discourage someone from putting in any effort when it comes to work, such as bad job choices, terrible wages, poor work / life balance, and lack of accomodations for the disabled who do want to try their best on the job. My other argument is that work has dramatically changed from what it was before 1980 because of the internet and automation. As a result, people are spending time upgrading their skills but can't learn fast enough to keep up with a job market that's being constantly altered by AI and higher and higher standards and requirements.

Calling someone lazy also isn't just naive; it's insulting. Everyone defines laziness differently. In fact, some people like Devon Price don't even believe laziness exists. Let's say, someone works from home with an Air B n B. Some might see that as lazy if the owner hires people to clean while all they do is make lodging arrangments on their phone all day while watching Amazon Prime. Some millenials have found efficient ways to do their jobs so it looks like they don't do anything. Some people are bored with the work, get everything done fast, and then do nothing once everything has been completed.

Meanwhile, there are folks who can't work because of an official diagnosed disability or because they have intellectual problems or because they're systemically treated unfairly when looking for a job (the are quite a few Republican states in the US with companies that treat coloured people on the job like complete garbage, so they quit because of systemic racism, go on welfare, and just think "What's the point?") We need to ask questions, be willing to empathize, and learn more about why people can't or don't work, instead of just saying they're lazy and nobody wants to work anymore.

At the end of the day, thinking that people are lazy isn't fair and it's degrading. We're all different. We have different skills and abilities. We individually have different reasons for how and why we work. While I believe we should have progressed to a point where we don't have to be at a job just to live, for now, why can't we build a society that appreciates all kinds of work while giving everyone a fair chance at a job, no matter who they are, without stupid ATS machines, without gatekeeping with horrible HR people doing job interviews, etc. By doing this, we can have safe work for everyone, people can do their best, and profit will be an amazing side-effect to collectively helping one another. We should look at the bigger picture and the problems that are part of society instead of just blaming individuals. We need to stop using words like lazy and start trying to understand our diverse populations. This way, we can create workplaces that are inclusive and equitable while ensuring everyone feels like a valuable part of a team.

So whenever someone tells you that "no one wants to work anymore," change the conversation instead of finding that meme with the older newspaper clippings that outline how the statement's been used over the last century. Share your own struggles to stay on top, outline the barriers that keep people you know from finding a job or moving up the corporate ladder, and firmly indicate that everyone is trying their best, regardless of who thinks who's best is good enough.

Building A Large Following Is Stupid

If you want to reach a large audience, appeal to idiots. - Arthur Schopenhauer

In 2012, I had huge plans after finding out about Fiverr.com. I'd use many of the software tactics, YouTube bots, and other blackhat software tricks to try and build my own following, my own content preaching about how to be a good artist, and I just wanted to make random videos where I was performing hip-hop and preaching my own gospel. But the more I got into it, the less authentic I was. Everyone could see it. I tried to fix things by telling my story. I looked into affiliate marketing and sponsors. I even went into $5K in credit card debt trying to build my own wellness platform. Sure, I got assets to build my own app development business, but that did not turn a great profit at all and resulted in my wife and I selling off our house.

I've been on Tik Tok and sometimes doom-scroll through Facebook Reels, and boy, am I disgusted by the lack of authenticity in almost everything I see on both these platforms. Even the high profile celebrities from California still make some of the most outrageous content I've ever seen. They hype it up with old communication tactics like fast-talking, over-the-top radio vocal tones, and even Italian hand gestures just to keep people engaged and not just viewing talking heads. No wonder social media marketing is becoming such a slog as both a job and a medium of communication.

The whole internet landcape has changed a lot in the last little while, not just because of Trump, but because a lot of people are getting fed up with X, Facebook, Threads, and Instagram where everyone's just trying to get a bazillion followers so they can "change the world" or "make a difference." Folks are now moving towards smaller, more relaxed online groups where the priority is deep relationships with a more tight-knit community of no more than 200 people. I think we're finally realizing that we need quality interaction and connection over massive quantities of likes or friends who may or may not be Chiness or Russian bots.

The focus of these small fediverse-ish groups is the intelligent conversations about something surrounding commonly shared values, instead of just scrolling through a bunch of random AI-generated pigmeat that doesn't do anything more than have people in the comments virtue signal or insult eachother in disagreement. This change is somewhat refreshing because it shows that those of us who grew up on Facebook and MySpace have matured while figuring out that being popular is kind of shallow in the digital world. It's like going from being at a giant party full of glitz, glamour, and rich kids where no one knows eachother to hanging out with a small group of friends who understand eachother. This whole shift goes to show that we're starting to value our time and relationships on the internet in a way that's real. Discord and Mastadon (depending on the instance) are perfect examples of what small community is like.

Mental Health Problems

There is more and more information coming out about so many folks experiencing brain-drain because of the massive waves of content putting us on endless social media feeds.

People are discovering that there are detrimental effects of spending too much time in the digital world on their personal well-being. Traditional social media has grown into an addictive time-suck, with users wasting time on their phones when they could be invested in more enriching activities and genuine relationships.

I know this personally, especially when it comes to relentless engagement with digital content resulting in a persistent state of distraction from autistic issues I struggle with, while frantically avoiding the present struggles and even happy moments that result in more rewarding experiences.

Scientific study has shown strong correlations between excessive use of social media linked to heightened psychological distress especially with Gen-Z. Issues such as depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem have become so widespread that many governments around the world had to get involved in children's mental health regulation. This resulted in the UK passing the Online Safety Act in 2022, while in the United States, warning labels appear on these platforms to underscore the gravity of mental health problems.

Unhealthy social comparison has constantly been a social media problem, but ever since the end of the pandemic, many folks are comparing their lives with each other after socializing again to see who has used the lockdowns to improve themselves VS others who complained, protested, or did nothing but watch movies and play video games. Users are frequently exposed to "happy pictures" of people's lives assuming that everything is going well with them, which fuels feelings of inadequacy ("Why can't I have the life Susan is having with her perfect husband and beautiful four children?").

Comparison coming from social media can lead to excessive consumption patterns, and influencers and advertisements can take advantage of the vulnerability of these users to get them to purchase items they won't value for long. It still baffles me that very few people outside the tech-industry actually take time to address these concerns as they significantly shape our daily interactions and perceptions of ourselves and the world around us.

A lot of people fail to understand how much using social media all the time can really change the workings of our brains. We're overwhelmed with so much content that our brains can't even process it all. We can't even see what we want to see or get the information on a person posting, community event, or benefit that a friend is sharing on their social feed because it takes four or five steps just to get to what we're looking for. It's like trying to read a magazine with travel ads every three sentences. We have no idea how to focus on anything important when constantly trying to mentally study one thing to the next in seconds.

And now, we're stuck with these pesky things called algorithms, which basically show us what they think we want to see. Some of it's good, some of it is not. Social media has become a strange game of Russian roulette. The roulette probability is run by echo chambers, where we only get one side of certain information. As a result, we can't learn new things and if we see other people's points of view, it's really skewed based on unreliable sources. As a result, all the clicks and the likes are used to feed the machine itself, to keep the system running, and as a result, keep us divided. It's our arguing and division that is keeping these social sites running. We continue to stick to our own opinions, we fail to understand each other, and as a result, our anger prevents us from going after the real culprits (billionaires who run this whole operation) while forgeting that there's a lot more to the universe than what our phones show us.

They're Still Messing With Our Heads

The trend of moving towards micro-communities doesn't mean everyone's giving up on social media, but many users are trying to use it differently. From taking breaks to working on personal mental health, many people still hang out on Facebook, X, and Instagram, but spend most of their time in these smaller groups where they actually feel closer to people.

This way of using social media lets people stay connected without getting burned out or depressed from always seeing "perfect" one-sided lives and getting their brain scrambled by algorithms that just put clickbait into the ether. People can still be part of the online world without feeling like they're in a popularity contest all the time.

But, even when people associate in these tight-knit groups, a bunch of influencers and companies are still raking in followers and likes on main social media platforms. From cats to animated thirst-trap accounts, there are still sketchy things content creators do to get more people to follow them, since they still hold onto that value of having a lot of friends than having good friends. There are still shallow individuals who think that being seen by as many people as possible, even if it's not real connection or healthy for anyone involved, results in winning some kind of game, or that they can use those people to support their causes. Sure, the exposure is nice, but nothing changes in the real world.

I think many influencers still want a bunch of followers so that they don't have to run out of money and work regular jobs like Burger King or Tim Hortons. The whole influencer racket is still going strong with the industry projected to circulate $480 billion all over the US by 2027, and everyone is still chasing the goldrush in the digital wild west for another piece of that pie, motivated to escalate those follower numbers, no matter what it takes. Some influencers, especially women, have gone so far as to start OnlyFans accounts just because they understand that views, sponsorships, and affiliate marketing aren't enough to make it as a content creator these days.

The Dark Hat Tactics of Social Media Followings

Many people still wonder how a lot of influencers get followers when they post some of the stupidest garbage on the internet. It's because not all those followers are actually real people. Influencers use shady methods that mess with the platform's metrics which sometimes can annoy regular users. These tricks just make it seem like certain content creators are popular and everyone loves their content, even if there are tons of other people who have no idea who they are.

One thing they do is buy followers, which was one tactic I used to do for a YouTube channel back in the day. Content creators can spend $60 and get 5,000 fake fans on Instagram right away. It's like buying a pack of friends, but all they do put a credibility mask on the social media page. Some content creators move to another business venture by buying out entire accounts that already have a bunch of followers, change the name and profile pictures, which results in "instantly being popular," and we all know what happened when Elon Musk did that with Twitter.

There's also a "follow/unfollow" game that's still used on sites like Bluesky. They use browser macros and bots to automatically follow thousands of people at once, wait for follow-backs, and if the people they follow don't respond, they just unfollow the account that was automatically followed in the first place. It's shallow and doesn't actually result in authentic interactions.

And it's not just about how many people are following them. It's also about the likes and comments. To enhance social media presence, people use engagement bots or join groups called pods. The organizations behind pods make a bunch of dummy accounts that automatically post engaging comments on the main account so it looks like a lot of people are interacting with their posts. The objective is to trick the system so videos, reels, and funny or contreversial posts show up more so brands think they're a big deal.

Why Micro-Communities Are Flourishing

As more and more people become tired of mainstream social media, the fediverse and micro-communities are thriving. Some instances of Mastodon, What's App, and even certain Telegram chatrooms have become exclusive clubs on the internet where everyone has shared interests and goals.

Discord's sign-ups have dramatically increased during the pandemic. People couldn't socialize in person. People needed community that was both digital and authentic. They didn't want everyone seeing dirty laundry or struggles to socialize online. They needed an outline where people would actually listen.

In micro-communities, people can who they are without worrying about keeping a perfect image or compromising their privacy. Places like Discord are so genuine that 41% of folks say they built trusted friendships there just like their actual friendships in person. Some even claim that Discord friends have their backs, even if they have never met those friends in person.

These small groups were as close as many isolated people could get to actual relationships. The conversations decreased activity in Facebook groups because people could actually build real connections. Micro-communities let groups share diverse opinions and talk about different ideas without the pressure of groupthink or being initiated into a cult. Depending on the Discord server, they felt they found a safe haven for curiosity and growth. Micro-communities gave people what they wanted from the internet: real connections and the freedom to be themselves without fear of judgment. No wonder everyone's switching to smaller corners of the web.

Content creators are also embracing the epiphany that hundreds of followers on social media isn't appealing anymore. They're seeing the switch to quantity of connections over quantity of likes and shares. Instead of trying to be YouTube or Facebook famous, these micro-communities collectively care about what you post.

This shift to smaller online spaces is giving users their mental health back as well. Users in these groups don't doomscroll anymore. Micro-communities give back more control over who connects with who and what people want to see. People on Discord start to figure out who's worth interacting with. These real connections are what make the internet feel alive and less like a popularity contest. A big objective of micro-communities is to build up to eventual exciting in-person meetups.

So as things keep changing online, close relationships that go from online to the real world will be prioritized. I still find it hard to believe that social media companies are picking up on this trend and they're slowly trying to figure out how to put more meaning into their platforms rather than just letting the algorithms focus on AI-sludge for everyone to see.

Looking ahead, the future of connecting online will still be a mix of micro-communities and Meta platforms that are all used in different ways. However, if you're trying to make a name for yourself online, it's important to remember that it's not just about getting followers, comments, subscribers, likes, or reactions. What really counts is authentic relationships with real people who long for deep connection. We all would like to build and join real communities so we all can have a better time in real life and online. The two worlds can't stay seperate for long.

Micro-communities are like social media finally figuring out what it values most. People are starting to care more about being happy and having real friends rather than just showing off the Instagram clout they can get from images of their cars, nuclear family Christmas cards, or business ventures. The purpose is to connect with people in a way that actually makes a difference.

Is X, Meta, SnapChat, or Tik Tok going to go away as trends change? Perhaps. But social media is maturing into something that's more than numbers, algorithms, and shares. Whether you're just a regular person, part of a group, or even a brand trying to get noticed, it's key to realize that the traditional way of networking isn't just stupid, it doesn't work anymore. It's better to resist the temptation to chase followers and instead cultivate real relationships with the people you interact with online. We all have to do our part to ensure the internet adds to our lives instead of giving birth to new mental health issues. And that's what we all want, right? For each interaction online to be something real.

The Mind of a Nationalist

I want to share a reflection of how my beliefs about both Canada and the United States have changed a lot since 2020. I'd like to share with you what I used to believe until sometime before 2021 and why my beliefs have changed. Make sure you have a coffee and some time to take this all in, because there is a lot to consider.

Take a step back and image that the country you live in is a nuclear family. The parents are a hetero man and a hetero woman who have agreed to a marriage where each spouse has specific roles to play. The man is the head authority of the household. His role in the family is to protect it from people who may harm the family as well as internal dysfunction. He is enforcer, protector, and in many situations, his word is final. His role may be seen as nurturing the kids, fixing the car, washing the dishes after work, or to do the budgeting, but its not.

Given all that, it should be no surprise that the woman in this marriage is submissive to this man. She is seen as innocent. She is ideally a mother. She is seen as someone who needs to be protected along with her children. She is a giver of life to the family, a life-giver who is loving, caring, nurturing, and is the "heart" of the family. She "maintains" the family. She gives so much life to the family that it continues to grow as long as the enforcing protective man is present and "planting seeds in her garden." The perfect woman in this partnership has never been with any other man until marriage. Her innocence extends to her exclusive purity and loyalty towards her one and only man. She prioritizes her own purity until the right man with the top protective enforcing qualities comes along.

This idea in deconstructed Christian circles is called a complementarian marriage. The complementarian marriage in the nuclear family image I illustrated earlier is a metaphor. It's a metaphor that shows how far-right nationalists, hardcore conservatives, and a lot of evangelical Christians view their own country. I know because I used to see Canada and the US like this since my mom, dad, and I attended Springs Church in the mid-90s. If one thinks of this complementarian marriage in the family that I described, there's a structure to how this family is supposed to be.

The country, according to the religious right, is a virginal homeland chosen by God. This homeland needs protection, love, and care in order to preserve this metaphorical complementarian social order. To provide that care, love, and protection, the nation needs its perfect man (protector and enforcer) and perfect beautiful unblemished woman (submissive caregiver and maintainer) who will uphold the country's "family values." In this order, the parents MUST be heterosexual, otherwise there is room for chaos and the downfall of the nation according to eugenicist turned Christian psychologist James Dobson.

In this young family structure, if a man shows nurture, care, meekness, and mercy instead of aggression and protective qualities like strength, a man isn't fulfilling his role in that perfect family or social order. If a woman is a tomboy, shows aggression, or can literally fend off a powerful man, she is also not fulfilling her role in that perfect family arrangement. If men and women don't fulfill their roles in this metaphorical marriage, the country is doomed.

The man doesn't just protect his family from outside invaders, but he protects the structure from internal rebellion as well. The man/father has to deal with children who throw tantrums, the rebellious girl who talks back, or a wife who doesn't submit to his authority. If both women and children cross the boundaries he makes, he has to enforce the order and law of his own household. The man does this by either using strong words or using physical force like spanking to keep order, and to keep foes away from harming the family or structure. The things a man fights are also considered things that can harm the methods, nurture, and care that the woman provides for her children. If his own children become sympathetic to an outsider, the man may have to choose between his children and the structure of the family.

Another idea to note in this family is that there is no back-story of how they got here. That family is just the universal ideal standard, a symbolic couple with obedient kids that represents the foundation of how a country is supposed to be. There's no story of how the children were born from a complicated pregnancy, how the couple met and fought through their differences before getting married, if there was adultery in the marriage, or if they decided to get a divorce at some point. All we know is that this family represents the harmony of the country. All we know of, is that this family is a symbol of innocence.

When nationalists think of the country they live in, through the lens of this perfect nuclear family, there's no room for a back story. There's no need for drama. There's no need to see how members of the family fought and reconciled. There's no need to talk about who was the favourite child and how there was hurt and exclusion because of favouritism. There's no need to see a miscarriage, domestic abuse, or the maxed out credit card from either the man or his wife drinking because the family is suffering. There's no indication of a struggle to become a great loving and flourishing family. What's important in the history of this family is how the man protected the structure, and how many children the pure untouched woman had only with that one man.

What's also important is that no other man has penetrated his home and family structure. This family is not like a body going through time. The family has no wounds or bandages and never says "The struggle is real." It's a family that is eternal with no history. This family structure was "always present." And that's the toxic positivity that nationalists fight for when they scream about wokeness or oppose movements like "Every Child Matters" or "Black Lives Matter." They cater to spiritual bypassing while refusing to understand their country as one with historical elements. They only want to see their country as one chosen by God that always existed in perfect harmony and structure.

This metaphor is exactly how the far-right talks about the United States or their own countries that they live in. And with the lack of awareness of their cognitive dissonance, they also discuss this metaphor with the inclusion of outside threats and conflict. And who brings the conflict to this complementarian marriage and family? Who or even WHAT outside forces does the man in the family have to stand up to in order to protect his wife, children, and the made-up social order of this nuclear family? It could be those with unfamiliar cultures from far away lands. It could be the next door neighbor with a mental illness that is undiagnosed. It could be anything on the outside that the family isn't willing to try to reason with or understand. This is also what nationalism does. Not to be politically incorrect, but it must be said: nationalism paints "foreigners" and "immigrants" as threats to the family and its structure (which is why we see certain Canadians complaining about Indians from Punjab taking jobs or Latin Americans bringing in drugs or Mexicans raping women according to Trump).

Based on the lack of back-story, history in itself is a threat to the family structure. History, according to nationalists, causes division and destroys the harmony of the nation. It exposes the uncomfortable conflict or problems that brought that country to where it is today. It changes how family members see each other. It even changes how friendly neighbors see the individual nuclear family. History may have even revealed that the country in question is actually the opposite of the complementarian nuclear family that claims to define a nation. This is why the far-right is threatened by Jim Crow, the civil rights movement, slavery, Japanese incarceration, Martin Luther King Junior, the US colonizing the Philippines, or in Canada, truth and reconciliation and the policies related to those things like the change of Bishop Grandin Boulevard to Abinojii Mikanah in Winnipeg. The nuclear family is now identified as far from innocent.

The other threat the family commonly faces is sexuality outside of marriage or heteronormative families. According to nationalists, woman and the kids in the family can be "changed," "penetrated," or captured by foreign / "unatural" sexual acts and other sexual ideas which they think will take down the structure of the home. Remember, in this structure, the parents and the kids HAVE to be heterosexual in order for the family to thrive in both good and bad times. The far-right believes that the family and the country it lives will eventually die if this is not the case. If there are similar families with two dads or poly parents, binary, or trans-members, those families are considered not ideal or even threatening to not only conservative groups that hold up the nuclear family as a standard, but the country itself.

It doesn't even matter if any of these other families do nothing offensive in public. It doesn't matter if someone's bisexuality stayed in the closet. It doesn't matter if a woman who is attracted to another woman is a virgin. It doesn't even matter if people who are different just want to be left alone. Just because certain groups simply exist, conservatives are afraid of those groups taking away this nuclear family structure. The other kinds of families become foreign invaders. They become something that will overtake the kids or stop parents from fighting back for their kids. They become something that will change how society views what is morally right and wrong. The family is exposed to things that are not nuclear family friendly, just because something they see as abnormal exists. There is never a time when those other families will be considered appropriate or accepted. There is never a time when the two groups can sit down and discuss each other's differences or how to live in peace and harmony. They are simply evil just because they breathe the same air as straight Anglo-Saxon Jesus-loving citizens.

The reason nationalism is being hyped up is because their ideology is at the end of its life-span. They also want to keep this family structure because they feel it holds society together. It also keeps the rich from losing money and everyone else from thriving. And that's what they want: rich white straight men to rule the world, the free market to keep them at the top, and everyone else to stay in their place in silence and submission.

This is just another item on my long list of reasons why I'm done with evangelicalism and going to church. Most evangelicals I know don't care at all about the strengths and identity that is beautiful because of people outside this structure and see anything and anyone they don't understand as something to be healed like someone who must get out of a wheelchair and start walking. Nationalists only care about curng difference and conformity and not about how any person or thing that is different can be used to create a harmonious country or an even better family structure than the metaphor most of this chapter is about. They want to pray all the diversity and colour away when it should have been prayed FOR in the first place.

Every time I've encountered so-called "threats" to this family structure that I used to be a part of for so long, I've never been forced to change my culture or way or doing things unless it was abusive. Almost every person I met who is different from me either wants to be left alone or just wants to be accepted for who they are. People can be uncomfortable and even have opinions I disagree with about many folks in my life, but that doesn't mean that how they see the perfect family has to be enforced into law or that one family deserves to exist while all others are the big scary demon possessed monsters that should only come out at night, remain unemployed, or stay in their cages and closets.

Every single living creature deserve dignity and the right to self-actualization. Every living individual needs food, shelter, and an income to live on with absolutely no conditions or gatekeeping. We don't need this restrictive ruling role-based social order just to be a functioning society. It's time to start questioning this coded model of the status quo and at least begin to learn what we can do to correct where we are in this hellscape of a planet today.

We Need Diversity

Let's just dive right into this chapter with a question: what is woke?

What does it mean when your conservative dad or uncle says that "Target is too 'woke' with their Black Lives Matter stuff. All lives matter."
What does it mean when a company dedicates itself to mental health and disability training and when no one changes their tone in the office, they say "We were too woke"?
What does it mean when someone tells a story of their experiences with racism, and in response to another person discrediting the story, that person discrediting is told to "Get woke"?
Lastly, if any of the people in these conversations are white, do ANY of the people in these conversations know what the hell they're talking about?

The typical theory is that people who are right of centre politically use the word "woke" to display their discomfort of protest against social injustices of marginalized groups of people. Some even go so far as to say that "woke" is a coded word that conservatives and far-right folks use to signal their support for a mayonaise-covered ethno-state (incase you didn't get that, let me ask you what colour mayonaise is). Many others even says that it's a way for people to be a racist without using the hard "R" word or to avoid being openly offensive expressing discomfort of anything that doesn't conform to "Western values."

The reason "woke" such an effective code-word these days is because anyone who is liberal, centrist, or even leftist, who hasn't figured out how to analyze these ideas, will still discuss the word as if it's worth bringing up. They'll also discuss it as if it means something without going into a deep dive of how others use the word "woke" in the first place. For example, a conservative politician who doesn't like the idea of progress could simply say "I'm not standing for this woke thing" and they'll know exactly what they mean when they say that and who they're talking to when using the word "woke." But then other people make a poor response and say "this isn't about wokeness. It's about helping people" as if that politician means something completely different. That's what the issue is.

Since 2021, no one is speaking the same language when using the term "woke." It doesn't matter if we're talking about legacy journalism, characters in a movie or TV show, progressive podcasters, or a family conversation about politics at Christmas-time. There needs to be clarity when using the term "woke" even if most of the time, white people misappropriate and co-opt the term to signal their support for white nationalism.

I personally believe before ANYONE uses this word, every person in a conversation about woke-ness needs to understand how we got to this point and why "woke" is such an offensive word in 2025.

The word “woke” was first coined in African American Vernacular English as a straightforward term meaning "awake" or "conscious" Of course as time passed, "woke" also had unspoken undertones beyond the focus on being concious of social injustice. In the early 20th century, black people used the term "woke" to express how aware they are of social and political issues, especially when it comes to race and inequality. Back in the day, black people would always tell each other to "stay woke" so that they knew what injustice was happening around them.

The word wasn't commonly used since then until shortly after Black Lives Matter began their protests. On Twitter, the hashtag #StayWoke became an organizing code for activists who focused on racial justice. It was used to spread news of incidents involving profiling, police violence, and other forms of systemic racism. "Woke" in this context was used to signal the ongoing push of racial injustice to keep folks alert in the fight for equality. The term slowly became more used in other progressive circles, including with activist organizations surrounding Pride events and other LGBTQ communities.

After the horrific death of George Floyd, "wokeness" was commericalized. For a long time, companies have been using the rhetoric of social justice movements in their marketing campaigns, often with monetary agendas rather than to support causes they were promoting, but since 2020, this marketing method constantly happens in June during Pride Month or April during Autism Awareness Month. This became known as “woke-washing” or during June's Pride month "pink-washing," where brands co-opt social justice language (using terms like "woke") to bring in customers making them think the company stands against social injustices while in the background refusing to address social issues unless they get paid. That's when the term "woke" started to face backlash at first from the left. Knowing this, maybe I should start pushing the term "aut-washing."

In late 2021, a Christian minister by the name of Owen Strachan wrote a book called "Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel — and the Way to Stop It. In the book, Strachan suggested excommunication for anybody who "did not repent of teaching CRT, wokeness, and intersectionality." Most people probably haven't even heard of Strachan, but once far-right Christians started to pick up his book, they started using "woke" to oppose policies on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which caused the term to go VIRAL in conservative and populist circles.

But that's not the only cause. Media figures and conservative podcasts also weaponized "woke" to the point where Govener Ron DeSantis helped kickstart Florida's "Stop WOKE Act" which explicitly targeted anything that right-leaning people viewed as extreme political correctness.

After all this, one thing people, who've moved away from social justice concerns, have started to focus more on is economics, while thinking that identity politics don't matter. This mindset is ridiculous. It's ridiculous to suggest that any kind of political discussion that invokes somebody's identity has nothing to do with economics. There's no discussion of identity that is seperate from good health, families, social and mental health, finances, unique lifestyles, and yes...finances. So good luck trying not to be "woke" while moving these goalposts around. Therefore, it is literally impossible to discuss politics at all without identity being at the root of every discussion taking place.

So now that you understand this history as a reminder, whenever anyone (no matter if they're liberal or conservative, left or right or centrist) uses the word "woke," ask them what they think it means and listen to what they say without interrupting. Because if they don't outline this history, the way they define "Woke" will most likely come out as a very awkward reply.

DEI (diversity, equity or inclusion or if Jordan Peterson takes the letters, he spells out the word "die") also goes through a similar conversation. There's also a variation of DEI that gets left out of the conversation, and that's A for accessibility (which focuses on autism, neurodivergent, and disability hires). When conservatives discuss DEI, they're not addressing programs that focus on equity, equality, inclusion, or diversity. They are talking about firing coloured or disabled people who they think were hired due to policies that push back against denying marginalized people access to jobs. They're talking about focusing on merit rather than hiring someone just because of their race, neurodivergence, or disability.

But the truth is that NONE of this is DEI. First, more talented diverse, neurodivergent, and disabled folks were increasingly being hired for at least two decades. And women have been in the workplace since the 1970s. The reason this must be pointed out, is because the conservative agenda is all about creating elite spaces for straight white men. Second, based on the social justice rhetoric being ramped up since 2020, centrists created programs, lunch and learns focused on marginalized workers, and executive positions that handle discrimination complaints. The condition with this move is that the service is there to keep "discriminated workers" happy as long as they don't a big fuss like the protestors on the streets did for George Floyd. And now, companies are standing up against all of this, even though it wasn't effective in the first place.

When we discuss DEI, conservatives aren't going on and on about the exclusive diversity hire or the centrists who creates the programs I outlined earlier. They're looking to get rid of exceptional, hard-working, marginalized people who they see suspiciously as groups of people who aren't good at their jobs. If a centrist responds to a conservative with agreement that DEI had issues, it won't make sense.

The problem is that conservatives and the far-right have hacked this political game of Snakes and Ladders and people who don't understand what's going on think that they're climbing a ladder when really, they're sliding on the snake. And yet, everyone is pretending the board isn't hacked at all with any white cheat-codes. Everyone thinks there's no way to win, which I believe is also not true.

My point in discussing DEI and wokeness the way I do is that we live in a world where it should be ok to be different. In fact, we NEED to all be different from eachother. And we need to push back against all this anti-woke, anti-DEI stuff, no matter what anyone is talking about. If we all just dropped conforming ideas, we would be free to be our own unique selves.

Being unique makes life way more interesting. And I'm not talking about being different because it's trendy. I'm talking about being different in terms of being comfortable in your own skin even if you come across as strange to everyone else. Everyone in one group getting comfortable in their own individual skins is like having a bunch of different colors in a box of crayons. The world would be super boring if all of us were just the same color crayon.

When differences are encouraged and shown off, we learn something new. We learn and grow when seeing or hearing about different cultures and ideas. It's like traveling the world without ever leaving your house or town, except the journey happens in our hearts. Learning about cultures isn't just good for us, it can greatly enhance entire communities.

Sadly, powerful people think being different means you're not as good as them, or you'll just be that strange nobody on the sidelines. Resist that nonsense. Being different means you're special in your own way. We all have our own strengths and things we need help with. That's life.

Now, for those of us who are autistic or just a bit different, I know firsthand how scary it is to show people who we really are. But when we do, we're on our way to figuring out what to do with our own lives. It's empowering, and it inspires people to try to make the best of what they have. We have to find safe communities to share our uniqueness because if we do it where we don't fit, we get into so much trouble. And it's good to leave those safe communities. It's better to be excluded for who gets included than to be included based on who's excluded.

Being different isn't always easy. It's difficult in a world that wants to constantly avoid the complexities of prejudice, discrimination, and feelings of isolation that make privileged people uncomfortable. It's important to have communities and groups where all kinds of individuals feel safe, respected, and celebrated for who they are. Even in environments where promoting policies of inclusivity, speaking out against injustices, and actively engaging in conversations that promote understanding and empathy are discouraged, organizing in the shadows must be done anyway. It can change even just one person's life.

If you're feeling like you're the only one who's different, don't worry! There's a whole universe of different people out there. We're among you. We're in your Discord servers, FAcebook groups, and out in the real world at places you work, places where you shop, and even in church. We're all just trying to navigate this wierd world we live in, and it's nice to have friends who go through similar struggles just to live in safety.

It may be odd that social media makes it look it diversity and inclusion is just one big joke, but remember, most of the loudest voices are throwing bots around to make it look like there's so many racists and bigots and neurotypicals out there. But there are still many folks in movies, books, and in geek culture that's do important work for many of us who are different, and that work makes us feel seen and heard. And that's what we want: a world where everyone feels like they're part of the story.

Being different in a world where everyone tries to measure up to unrealistic standards and people who all dress the same and do the same things is what being radical is all about. It's about understanding and supporting each other, making spaces where we can all be our true selves, and pushing for change that makes the world a better place for everyone. When we do that, life not only becomes interesting. It builds environments of hope and fulfillment. I mean, really, we started being inclusive with women in the workplace before the 1980s. We can't turn back now.

Be Careful What You Get Pissed Off About

In today's digital age, we're constantly bombarded with news of injustice and inequality from every corner of the globe (and it doesn't help that we get little bits and pieces of both unimportant and big stories from Tik Tok loops or minute-by-minute Meta reels). From climate change to racial discrimination, wealth inequality to refugee crises, there seems to be no shortage of issues demanding our immediate attention and emotional investment. With Trumps second term and so many things to get pissed off about, it may seem impossible, but we all can effectively channel our outrage into meaningful action without becoming overwhelmed or burned out in the hellish depths of social media doom-scrolling. I'm going to go over some ideas and methods of selecting causes, building community, and maintaining our well-being while using outrage well to fight for a better world.

Before I jump into this, I'm not saying that one issue is more important than another. We all have individual things that are important to us, and because we are human, we all can only do so much for each other. No one can save the entire world. But sometimes, sharing all the links to the outrageous things Elon, JD Vance, Lindsey Graham and other politicians do or say can lead to something called "compassion fatigue." I experienced this in 2017 after coming back from my cruise in Florida and realizing what a corrupt place the US was. The anger I felt, drove me to a state of emotional exhaustion and some people called me out on how ineffective I became advocating for change. The truth is that when we try to be outraged about everything simultaneously, we diminish our impact when discussing or putting effort towards solving the causes that feel meaningful to us. Recognizing our limited resources — whether time, money, or emotional energy—is the first step toward more effective activism.

Like I said before, this recognition isn't about indifference. It's working with the idea that meaningful change requires focus. By understanding our limitations, we can preserve our mental health and refrain from being overwhelmed by the world's problems popping in our doom-scroll and instead direct our energies to what individually matters most to us.

Finding Your Focus Through Personal Values

When it comes to choosing what we value, I think this is one of the biggest problems today in our political climate. Rather than attempting to share and scream about everything awful that's happening in the world, there has to be priority on issues that align with our deepest values and personal experiences. For me, I focus on disability and neurodiverse struggles of those in these marginalized groups. Others deeply connected to nature might focus on environmental justice, while another group of folks might champion gender equality based on personal experiences with discrimination. A more focused approach ensures that social justice advocacy is fueled by genuine passion rather than outrage as an over-rated social media induced emotion.

This values-based selection process helps our collective society maintain long-term commitment to our causes. When activism aligns with personal values, people are more likely to make lasting change even with challenges and setbacks. Outrage then becomes a sustainable driving force rather than a temporary emotional response.

Before diving headfirst into any cause, it's importance to educate oneself and critically understand an issue before taking the fight to the street to government or before even making a phone call to an MP or senator. Thoroughly researching an issue in terms of how the root causes, affect populations, and what potential solutions should be put forward enables us to make more informed decisions about where to direct our efforts. This knowledge helps us identify truly pressing issues where progress and change can have meaningful impact. Of course, you'll have people with different values that get in the way of each other. Sometimes in situations where arguing hasn't escalated into violence, tolerance is the only solution because part of living in a democratic society is dealing with things that are very uncomfortable.

It's so easy to focus on the "biggest" problems and it's challenging to build a self-aware understanding of our specific skills, resources, and passion that can create sustainable change. But we can continually learn about the complexity of social justice issues, so that our perspectives and knowledge can deepen so that causes prioritized might shift accordingly.

It's also important to note that individual action and awareness can be powerful, but collectively, changes are stronger together. We all must work together to amplify our impact. We can do this by pooling resources, sharing expertise, and directing energy accordingly toward shared goals. Finding community with like-minded collectives provides practical and emotional support in challenging times.

These connections help keep commitments strong when progress seems slow or challenges are thrown at us. By aligning with others who share our vision, we create support systems that nourish our activism and extend our reach far beyond what we could accomplish alone.

Self-Care as a Revolutionary Act

Perhaps most importantly we must understand that effective activism requires balance. Activism takes a tremendous emotional toll, especially when on the spectrum, making burnout a significant risk. We need boundaries, breaks from social media, and times to focus on activities and interests to bring back joy while seeking community and support. All this is essential to keep the fire going while preserving our compassion and empathy.

As usual, society needs to be reminded that self-care isn't selfish, it's actually courageously strategic. By ensuring our own mental and physical well-being, we ensure that our ability to remain engaged with the causes we care about will be a long-term journey towards progress. The most effective advocates understand that sustainable activism requires sustainable living practices, not just the tasks of organizing and fighting.

More Than Passion

I get how it is. Outrage is both natural and necessary. But effective advocacy requires more than passion alone. Advocacy requires some personal responsibility to build mental health, focus, continuous education, and collective resposibility to preserve community. By thoughtfully selecting causes aligned with our values (even intersectional ones), deepening our understanding of complex issues, collaboration with others, and maintaining our personal well-being, we transform momentary outrage into something that can change our world dramatically for the better (sending populism and fascism on the run back into its dark shadows and echo chambers).

The path to social change isn't about trying to fix everything right away. It's about finding where we can do our part individually in small collective communities. When we approach activism with a strategy while controlling what we get pissed off about, we don't just avoid burnout. We create sustainable movements capable of building the just world we envision. Outrage, when channeled wisely, becomes more than a reaction to injustice. It turns into a powerful catalyst for changing the world.

Stop Trying to Be Right

I don't attend protests. I'm not proud of a country, its heritage, nor do I stand for dynamic individual changing cultures (and it's not because I don't like them). The events of January 6th, the "Freedom Convoy," and the trend to "buy Canadian" or get our elbows up actually make me cringe. And right now, it's not beause I disagree with the surface-level agendas behind all these things.

To me, the deeper nationalism and patriotism in politics in general has made me very skeptical of what people are fighting for. Country flags, national anthems, and all the fireworks on Canada Day and the Fourth of July just seem so shallow to me now. The more people get all worked up about how great their country is, the more I see folks justifying superiority, becoming much more furious on social media, and getting themselves mentally ready for war against people who don't fit in this "great nation."

All this has started to make me wonder if there is a stark difference between the sickle and the hammer, the stars and stripes, the red bars and the maple leaf, or even the cross of Christ? They all just seem to be devices for inciting transcendent loyalty which can easily turn its back on moral clarity, courage, and concern with helping regular people live healthy self-actualized lives in general. Looking at our political climate in 2025 makes me wonder if people are just fighting to be right while avoiding to be wrong about everything as people slowly suffer or take their final breath. I'm worried that if I ever get to a place where I'm carrying a picket sign, I'll eventually figure out what ugliness I'm protesting later on.

I've come to a place in my life where being wrong can be beneficial. In a society that's all about being sure of everything and getting the right answers, I think it's time to talk about why making mistakes can be a real game-changer for personal growth.

As I continue to mature, I've discovered I've been wrong about basically everything in my life. I used to think I knew it all in high school but I didn't. And that's actually a good thing. Growing as a person isn't just about going from wrong to right. It's becoming less and less wrong. When we learn something new, we're not reaching the truth; we just enter new rooms where we're just as clueless as before.

When you think about it, certainty is a roadblock to growing as a person. When we think we know it all, we ignore new discoveries and miss new oppurtunities and new lessons that are right under our noses.

One of the biggest reasons I'm writing this chapter is because I'm surrounded by friends and family who believe at least one conspiracy theory. At first, my knee jerk reaction has always been to go on rants to debunk the nonsense that's been brought to the dinner table or living room discussions, but it took a long time for me to learn that I myself may believe some things that may either be biased or completely wrong (also, I love how autism automatically throws some poorly coloured glasses on my face).

I had to learn that when trying to talk to someone who's deep in conspiracy theories while thinking they're never wrong, empathy and patience are a requirement, not an option. Most of the time, a lot of the lies or actual conspiracies that people are aware of surround a fact or injustice that is a truly devastating issue (unless those conspiracies are created to attack certain groups like Jews or Haitians (no one is eating the dogs)).

When you think about it, humans aren't perfect thinkers. Facts and events get lost in translation the more they are spread, like when you play the game of telephone, where you whisper something and by the end, the facts, events, or the overall point to get across in communication is completely different. This happens because we tend to remember anything based on our individual experiences, biases, and education; all which constantly change over time.

We also tend to create meanings and patterns behind things when none actually exist, like finding shapes in clouds, but with information we think is ground-breaking and important. And once we're convinced of a true or false epiphany, we become stubborn and want to stick to these new ideas, even when we're told that we're completely wrong or listening to the wrong thought-leaders or podcasts. Sometimes I wonder (no matter the political leaning) if everyone struggle with these cognitive quirks.

Another point I want to address is that it's helpful to have doubts. Sometimes we have to be our own reporters with a healthy dose of skeptisism. Asking questions is good for personal growth and sometimes it's good to question what's really going on behind the scenes. And even after investigating everything, we still have more questions, and that's perfectly fine. No matter how deep we dig into a story or an idea, we still need to be open to the idea that we amy not be 100% right. We just get better at understanding the story or idea. The objective to learning should never be to have "the correct answer," the objective should be to become a little less wrong about what we're learning every day. Besides, if we did know everything and stopped asking questions, there would be no desire to explore the world around us and life would be extremely boring.

All this being said, there are some stories and facts (especially in science and medicine) that have been studied, tested, and proven to be common sense and widely accepted in our society (for example, Andrew Wakefield's original theory in the 90s that vaccines cause autism has been researched, tested over a long period of time, and debunked multiple times). That's the beauty of progress. When we're trying to figure out what's true and what's false, we need to question the sources of information we learn from and consider how credibility they are and what kind of potential biases they have. Sometimes, there might be more than one right answer, especially if different people have different needs or viewpoints. That's why it's important to learn from all sorts of angles, especially when listening to tought-leaders and people who claim to be experts. There are always times when we find out that something we believed is actually false, and we should never be ashamed to change our minds. It's what keeps us learning rather than moving the goalposts and covering up mistakes in shame.

Lastly, one of the reasons I'm no longer a conservative is because I learned first-hand how holding onto certain beliefs can be harmful. Holding onto those beliefs keeps us from seeing learning oppurtunities, life-changes that lead to realistic personal development, and yes, even maturity. If we remain stuck in our own ideas about how the world works, fear, moral panics, and the blindnes that comes with privilege can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, if we believe that somebody is an angry person and we constantly say things to them that piss them off, guess how they'll react? And that's the problem. Being attached to our beliefs can make us completely blind to other important information to learn about people, events, experiences, and facts. In the above example, the reason that angry person may be pissed off about what triggers them is because what causes them to be angry had something to do with a traumatizing experience or another person who hurt them. We need to know the whole story before solidifying our beliefs.

We need to always consider the possibility that our beliefs about people, facts, events, experiences, and yes conspiracy theories aren't always the way we think they are. Questioning beliefs is a sign of intellectual strength and emotional intelligence. We need to keep our brains from operating in default because in that state, they just automatically make up stories about how to view the entire world around us while always connecting the dots that can form a very strange mental image.

We have to constantly build self-awareness and take time to mentally tweak our brains to ask questions, investigate, and learn new things.

So here are a few questions to ask while determining how less wrong we can be:

1. What beliefs do I hold that might not be as right as I think?
2. Are there different perspectives or other people who challenge my views that I can check out or listen to?
3. How can I adjust my view and stance on something when I learn a new thing?
4. What mistakes and errors can I use as an opportunity to learn and grow?

Again, the whole point isn't to be the sole purveyor of truth in the universe. It's not about being right. It's about being less wrong about the way we see the world each day compared to how we've seen the world the day before. It's all about learning new facts or events, admiting when we make mistakes in the learning process, and trying to be more hunble and emotionally intelligent when sharing information with friends and family. Believe it or not, making mistakes, failure, and admiting we can be wrong are stepping stones in a very long exhausting journey to eventually discovering what really is right.

The Future is Uncertain

Recently I learned that an organization was formed called the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship. The group holds conferences advertised as inspiring cultural gatherings focused on reclaiming Western values. But when looking into the organization further, their finances show that some of its funding comes from Dubai while evangelical English aristocrats use the prestige of the group and its figureheads like Eric Weinstein and Jordan Peterson to popularize a hardcore conservative political, economic, and religious agenda.

There are groups like this that exist ever since the 1960s such as The Alliance for Defending Freedom, Focus on the Family, and the Heritage Foundation, all which are backed by multi-millionaires due to ideological alignment with meritocratic and fiscal spending ideas. While I'm not criticising these groups in this book, I'd like the existance of these folks to remind us that cultural preservation of the West is a big deal and something everyone's talking about right now.

It should make us think about whether the people who run the system are really just trying to keep their own culture alive and well, or if they're just trying to preserve the status quo so their way of life won't dissappear. What's really going on in the minds of the rich or the so-called elite when they say they want to reclaim Western or Judeao Christian values? Why the power games? Do they deal with how cultures and socieites change so the progress or poverty works to their advantage?

On one hand, there are advocates of cultural preservation who believe that culture itself is the glue that holds everyone together while giving them a sense of identity. The so-called "elite" in Western countries ensure the preservation of museums, heritage buildings, and places that focus on history and culture in order to ensure that classic art, stories, and traditions aren't forgotten. They say it's not just about keeping their power, but that they also want to keep regular people feeling as if they belong and have something to be proud of. Yet by putting their own culture forward with Top 40 songs on the radio, art galleries, and university curriculums, they claim they want to keep the world from conservatism, while also trying to keep things special and different for each society.

On the other hand, groups like the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship or the Alliance for Defending Freedom may not say it, but they want to keep things the way they are in their corrupt echo chambers while everyone on the outsides suffer. They do this by supporting anti-semetic conspiracy theories attacking George Soros or intellectual dark web ideas from Sam Harris that make the current hurtful capitalist social order seem okay.

For example, having lots of Western-style institutions around keeps anyone making seven figures or more on top without the rest of society realizing it. And we're not just talking monetarily speaking, we're talking influence as well. When going over history, these people prefer that schools teach primarily about our victories and advancement rather than history where countries colonized each other or kept marginalized folks as slaves. This makes it seem like the past was sunshine lollipops and rainbows, which is not true, but it does explain why the right wants to go back to a mythical past where whites ruled the world. In a way, keeping old traditions alive seems like a clever way for those in power to stop new ideas from becoming mainstream. That way, they keep the system that gives them more power and makes sure the cycle keeps on looping without a break.

Most people running the system, conservative or liberal, hate the idea that cultural identity isn't a static concept. It's always evolving. People in charge in Western countries might think they're preserving culture when they do something important, but they keep on forgeting how diverse the country they're part of actually is. When this is forgotten, the little guy gets shoved aside while the innovative output of the diverse working class gets dramatically watered down.

Also, when we start turning our cultures into throw-away products that can be bought, used, and then sold on Facebook Marketplace, what's real, valuable, and special about those products is taken for granted and in many cases dissappears entirely. A great example of this is when rich folks take a vacation and all they see in countries like the Philippines are shiny, bustling parts of the Manilla business districts that are advertised on tourist brochures.

When we get too obsessed with purity culture while protecting the status quo, we end up completely shutting down innovation. That's not good. We may as well command a plant to never grow or change because it looks good once it reaches a certain state. But plants need to grow and change. It's the same with cultures and ideas.

So is there a good balance between keeping what's important and letting things naturally progress including Western values? It's a good question, but it requires another book to write.

Debating how the system keeps going is complicated and full of different layers when looking at it from the top down. Sure, the rich, powerful, and influential might really care about preserving history and culture, but it's also pretty clear that they do it to keep ruling at the top with an iron fist.

But when looking at the idea from the middle or the bottom, there are more important things right now than preserving culture.

It's really hard to live right now. Many of us are using alcohol, anti-depressants, mood stabilizers, beta blockers, psychedelics, porn, and illegal street drugs to cope with the terminally corporatized wasteland that has been left for us.

We're a generation that has seen parents panic over TV, movies, & video games that aren’t spiritual. We were told to recycle & we still litter. We've seen two teens sh00t up a school while parents blame the same kind of machines that gave us Tetris. We've seen three planes take down three buildings. We've gone through lots of economic recessions. We watched an insane billionaire become leader of the world. We've pushed through a pandemic & as a result continue to get more sick & more selfish. We've seen our neighbors & friends strike & fight for their right to live & all we can do is cheer them on hoping for the best. And even in our sickness, trying to heal, trying to get better, just trying to speak up for what is truly right, we're called virtue signalers because apparently we're "lazy" but "healthy enough" not to be a "slacktivist" to show how "self-righteous" we are.

We’re a generation that is encouraged to monetize every thought or hobby we have in order to afford living in closets. Unless, of course, we’re willing or even able to move out to the middle of nowhere & live vicariously through the internet, or insert ourselves into tight-knit fundamentalist cults, an online self-help movement, or MLMs.

We were told to be nice to each other, to eat lunch with the kid that no one loves, to agree to disagree, to live in harmony & unity, to give our change or sandwich to the homeless man who can't afford to eat at Subway. Now, we're losing good people we cared about deeply to an "us VS them" virus while trying to get them to talk about something without conspiracy or trying to connect with their "old-self" in a healthier way at the dinner table. And now, if we say certain "impure" groups of people deserve an abundant life, it’s career or social media suicide.

Some of us work 2, sometimes 3 jobs to make ends meet (and some of us are stuck volunteering because no one will hire us) while baby boomers and simps for billionaires call us lazy because they live in an alternate dimension where the median price of a house is $20K. We're told that we're blessed and that we'll be fortunate and "to be envied" if we're rich hard workers who sacrifice our dreams and our mental health, or worse, we're sinners deserving our own living hell if we make less than $30K a year or do whatever we can to actually find freedom through sacrifice. And we're told we, the poor, who continue to dig looking for life, who are treading water in a sea of the so-called "developing world," deserve our exclusion, wage, sickness, or other issues we struggle with simply because we're disabled or intellectually challenged.

We were forced to watch while many baby boomers and some of their Gen-X counterparts ushered in a US dominated Christian autocracy as some warped act of revenge against the generations they raised. It is messed up the way older generations act towards us just for simply existing, just for simply being. They want revenge on us because we can actually articulate our feelings, our despair, and our on-going pain.

We’re dying prematurely, while the powerful insist on living forever just to hold us hostage while we struggle and pour out blood, sweat, tears, and urine just to make it to tomorrow.

Meanwhile, we’re forced to listen to the ubiquitous, insipid droning on & on about “staying positive” or being "blessed" or "all things working together for good" from people who’ve never suffered in any real way. We're cogs in a giant machine toiling for a whole culture who loves false prophets spewing false promises & gaslighting; a "thriving" economy of ableist grifters selling hyper-individualistic New Age, New Thought, human potential manifested Protestant work ethic gospel mysticism in the form of lower-case T'ed multi-tiered "answers."

Today, we're told "put family or church first / celebrate our health-workers / donate to charity / help the poor." Tomorrow, we're told "be yourself / let it rip / buy the latest thing for yourself / don't support welfare queens." Our values and boundaries are constantly being pushed, tested, and tossed in the way of cognitive dissonance! Now we don't know who to trust or what to believe anymore!

I'm one of the many whose life expectancy is declining, & I watch while the suicide rate became the highest it has been since World War II. But we just have to “realign our thinking” while we might soon start testing positive for bird flu, right? We just need to keep putting our faith in that promise that "God won't give more than we can handle" even if we suffer from back pain and acid reflux, right? I don't know. I don't know because the mantra of “accepting the things we cannot change” has led us to accepting the unacceptable.

We’re surviving on bad advice in bad material circumstances. We’re told to save for a retirement we won’t live to see because the sun will cook us alive before 2100. We’re told to focus on building “careers” to support an economic model based on infinite growth on a finite planet, because none of the people telling us these things can see past their own quarterly profits. They can’t see the burning forest through the trees while they’re bulldozing them with fossil-fueled vehicles to build condos no one can afford or bunkers they can shelter in so they survive post-Rapture "events of Revelation."

But hey, with any luck, maybe they’ll invent a drug that cures us of the human condition, reducing our nervous systems to a series of computations while the artificial intelligence we’re developing paints and writes songs and makes movies as we watch them from our phones while looking for food people in suits throw away on the street corners.

Ray Bradbury, Aldous Huxley, & George Orwell were more prescient in their books than the ancient ones we use to justify the never-ending wars we pay for unwillingly with our tax dollars that are supposed to go toward making our lives tolerable. But they won’t, because war is the only thing North America exports. Thanks to Arthur Finkelstein, moral panics have now become the ultimate distraction from real issues affecting our livelihoods.

And so, each day, I strive to live laugh and love, I strive to thrive and not just survive, and I continue to struggle while stuck with the epiphany that eventually, we can't ignore the need to fight back if we're strong enough. Hopefully there are enough people in this world that are like forests, forests that always slowly grow back after constantly being burned. And hopefully, we can be like certain kinds of mammals adapting to whatever climate change throws us.

But right now, even after saying how bad things really suck, human life has to be saved. People are protesting in desperation for change. People are fighting for sustainable living, conservation, and for costs for everything to be lowered rather than for governments to be gutted by fascists. It's a big job and everyone will have to figure out what they can do so we can help ordinary people live well again.

This is the entire world's biggest homework assignment, and the grade is literal survival. We can do better if we're smart and care about the future. There is so much to live for on this planet. Despite what Christians say, earth is our home. It's up to us to make sure our kids and their kids can enjoy it. The rich and powerful can cry and whine about Western values dying all they want, but the first thing we need to do is stop listening to them, and make sure regular people can help the next generation figure out what kind of world they want.

It's Too Late For Me, But Maybe Not For You

The majority of what you just read are things I wish I could have learned at least ten years ago.
I'm disabled and can only do so much to fight for our right to live better than how things are in this petty excuse for Western society. I have a lot of regrets in my life. There are times when I wish I focused on school so I could be more free than I am. There are times I wish I spent less time trying to be popular or trying to be powerful or influential. There are times I lay awake at night and wish I pursued video game music professionally during the pandemic. There are times when I wish I could have moved to a larger city before getting married to my wife and being stuck here in Winnipeg. But it is what it is.

I'm almost 42 years old. I'll be lucky if I live another 20 years. I'm not sure what I'm gonna do with that time but I do know that I'm going to try and live by most of these principles that I learned in the last five years.
I'm not sure how spiritual I am but I definitely know I'm an agnostic, and I reject pretty much anything evangelical at this point in my life. Some days I do wonder if a powerful spiritual creator is real and if he actually does control things. Or do they just jump in every so often to intervene in big messes and other times just watch people do stupid things and eat popcorn? Anyway, that's a subject for another book.

It's probably too late to use this knowledge to begin a new full-time career or to fix my back problems and acid reflux that I struggle with. With our really gross political climate and the way people are just so angry with each other these days, I don't know how influential I'll be if I start over when it comes to social media or trying to get this book published somewhere.

The point is I don't have that much control now. I can't control who reads this and who doesn't. If my nephews or nieces find this book, I'm not sure if they'll like what they read and I'm not sure if they're going to let their friends know about it. If my relatives see it, I have no idea what they're going to think of me. If my mom sees it, I'm pretty sure she's going to disown me and if she doesn't, I will be very surprised as to what positive feedback she gives me.

I honestly don't think this current system that we're in is going to last much longer. I think it's going to be completely replaced right before I die in a senior citizen's home with a N64 controller in my hand. Maybe things will be so different that we won't even need to have a book like this at all. But it's always good to keep it around so that people understand how things were. Maybe things won't be so different even if the world changes.

Anyway, I'm gonna repeat some advice that my grandmother gave before she went into a full struggle with dementia: Just don't give up. I know, the advice isn't really groundbreaking at all. It definitely lacks a lot of novelty, but we need this now more than ever, especially for those in the US who are struggling with an orange Cheeto for a leader. Well, I'm not a fan of the idea that everything happens for a reason I know there is a reason for us being here (that's probably where my agnosticism comes in). What's important is that we find that reason individually. We can't let self-help or any collective determine that for us.

If you have an interest that may not necessarily be relevant, do what you can to chase it, especially if it gives you life, if it gives you peace, and if it helps you connect and be loving towards other people. And if you feel helpless, ask for help as soon as possible don't wait. Do it now. I've always had times where I've waited at least 6 months or more before asking for help with something. Perhaps that's an autism thing, and maybe I'm a little ableist with myself, but we have to try. This world will try to hurt us. Especially when it comes to greed and money. Rent being due. Credit cards being overdrafted or maxed out and we still have to pay the minimum balance anyway. Food and groceries getting so outrageously expensive. It's all sick. We all need to support each other during these hard times especially now that we're transitioning into, most likely, a ridiculous authoritarian age that hasn't been around since I was a kid in the 1980s. If you're reading this and you feel like nothing has changed, don't just attend protests with others against this authoritarianism. Do more than protest, raise awareness, connect with revolutionaries, and foster solidarity and hope. We are beyond civility and chanting for justice. We are beyond appealing to the humanity of our oppressors. Organize to take direct action and fight like hell. Push for concrete results. Risk being arrested like I did in the past. Go hard for obstructions and lockdowns. Don't let fear or the popo hold you back. Again, if you're really desperate, if your governors or city mayors or even federal agents have put you in a corner, you have to fight back! Your freedom is important. Your autonomy is important. Your mental and physical health is important. Your diverse community is important. Your future is important. Your ability to love, care, be compassionate, and be empathetic is important. The kids that you care about that are probably going to live through really rough times up ahead are very important. Fight for yourself and for them. If what you are fighting for is worth it, be willing to die for it.

I hope this book will help you even if it just gives you a little more confidence or puts a smile on your face or if you learn something new that's what matters. Don't give in to the default or to the system that they want you stuck in. You deserve a life filled with good challenges and fulfilling experiences and relationships with your friends and family, even if you aren't rich or married or fully healed from hurt or awful health.